

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

A Weekly Journal

CONDUCTED BY

CHARLES DICKENS.

No. 117.—THIRD SERIES. SATURDAY, MARCH 28, 1891. PRICE TWOPENCE.

CROSS CURRENTS.

By MARY ANGELA DICKENS.

Author of "A Mist of Error," "Her Inheritance," "A Social Success," "Kitty's Victim," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

"WHAT a voice!"

"How graceful!"

"What wonderful eyes! My dear, they'll make her fortune!"

From all parts of the room such comments came, in tones more or less audible, more or less sincere.

"She's too thin!"

"All that excitement is out of place in a room like this."

"Where did the Tyrrells pick her up?"

There were about a hundred people in the room, all well-dressed, all having the unmistakable hall-mark of "society," all stirred, as such an assemblage is not often stirred, by one common interest. It was about half-past four o'clock in the afternoon, and the warm May sunshine, as it shone in upon them, was subdued and chastened by delicate Indian draperies. These had evidently been chosen with the most careful reference to the papering on the wall, and the tinting of the ceiling, which was all, or almost all, that could be seen of the room at the moment. The other inanimate details—equally harmonious when they were visible—were now obscured by groups of men and women, groups which shifted and changed, combined and dispersed like the pattern of a kaleidoscope as people met one another, exchanged remarks and comments—mainly

on one topic—and passed on in the same instant, as though the great object to be attained by each individual was the exchange of three words with every one in the room in turn. The air was sweet, if a little close and heavy, with the scent of quantities of flowers. Every one was interested, eager, at his or her best. John Tyrrell, the master of the house, was an actor, successful and fashionable; he and his sister gave only one "at home" in the course of the season, and they were by no means indiscriminate in their choice of acquaintances—to be seen at their house stamped an individual as "somebody," if somebody only in the world of fashion; and with that curious homage to intellect, which is as much an instinct of humanity as it is a social phrase, the shallowest titled or monied nonentity who crossed the Tyrrells' threshold felt vaguely that something was expected of him or her, and endeavoured, more or less impotently, according to their kind, to respond to the demand.

"Selma Malet!"

The name seemed to be in the very air, so many people were asking the same question and receiving the same answer.

"Miss Selma Malet!"

It was echoed by an old lady sitting at the end of the room with some disfavour.

"Selma!" she repeated, "ah, she's not an English girl. I thought not. What countrywoman is she, I wonder? These geniuses are generally Poles or Russians."

She was a tall old lady, plain in countenance, and, as compared with nearly every other woman in the room, shabby in dress; except for her height, which was commanding, her nose, which was aquiline, and her manner, which was slightly supercilious, she was as unlike the typical duchess

as a woman could be. But a duchess she was, nevertheless, and the well-preserved, elderly man to whom she spoke, a rather distinguished art critic, responded with due alacrity.

"She is a Greek," he said, with the air of one who knows, though he would have been much puzzled to quote his authority; "that is to say her mother was a Greek—a very beautiful woman with a terrific temper. She stabbed her husband in a fit of jealousy, and then died of remorse; quite a girl she was, about two-and-twenty."

"Dear me!" ejaculated his auditor, with a general air of disapprobation of such ill-regulated proceedings, combined with a desire for further details. "This young woman takes after her mother, no doubt. It is to be hoped she will control herself better. Where has she been brought up? Ah," she went on, "here is Miss Tyrrell. She will tell us all about Miss Selma Malet."

A woman of five or six-and-forty—the only woman visible wearing neither hat nor bonnet—detached herself suavely from the group with which she had been talking as the Duchess spoke, and came towards her. She was beautifully and elaborately dressed, and her whole personality, from her wonderful auburn hair to her graceful manner, was a triumph of artistic arrangement. She was not beautiful, not even pretty; but her fallow face and light eyes seemed as essential to the completion of her whole effect as the admirably chosen colours of her gown. She was too thin for grace, but she never made a movement which did not harmonise with everything about her.

"I have been on my way to you really for ages," she said, sweetly, with that mixture of deference to rank and consciousness of the immeasurable superiority conferred on her by her connection with art, which was one of the secrets of Miss Tyrrell's success with society. "Did I hear you speaking of Miss Malet? I hope you were pleased?"

Whatever her private opinion might have been, the Duchess would have been a bold and self-confident woman indeed if she had ventured to confess to such bad taste as the tone in which the question was asked imputed to any one who might reply in the negative.

"Delighted!" she replied, promptly; "quite charmed, I assure you. Mr. Marsden," referring to the man who still

stood by, "Mr. Marsden has been telling me her story. Most romantic, really."

Miss Tyrrell turned to Mr. Marsden with her most artistic smile.

"Which is your version?" she said. "There is the Irish peasant version, the Italian princess version, the Greek version, and—poor Selma—of course, the barmaid version. Which is yours?"

The late authoritative biographer glanced from the expectant Duchess to his hostess with an expression which was the reverse of amiable.

"I'm afraid I must confess to what you call the Greek version," he said, with a forced laugh. "Have I really been misinformed?"

"Everybody seems to have been misinformed," said Miss Tyrrell, lightly; "it is impossible to say how it has happened." Miss Tyrrell was perhaps hardly speaking the unvarnished truth when she said these words.

"The facts are really ridiculously simple," she continued. "Selma Malet is an English girl, and a lady, neither in the depths of poverty nor rolling in riches. Her father was a man of quiet literary tastes, and one of my brother's oldest friends. Her mother was without characteristics of any kind, and died a natural death, about two years ago. Her father died—also a natural and uninteresting death—about three months later. All the interest attached to Selma Malet centres in herself alone. My brother expects great things of her. I hope you agree with him, Mr. Marsden?"

"Dear me," ejaculated the Duchess once more, and alluding to the very simple story Miss Tyrrell had told. "Really; is that all? Well, one would never think it from her—her appearance, and—and her—manner. Dear me!"

Miss Tyrrell smiled.

"It might be better for her," she said, "if one of these romantic stories did belong to her; there is so much attraction to some people about a romance. But I don't know, after all, that we have not been just a little over-done with Russians, and Swedes, and barmaids, and Countesses. Such a beautiful artistic feeling as Selma Malet's seems to me the more interesting, when it develops itself in such an unexpected quarter. A young English lady and an artist are curiously incompatible terms!"

"Do you believe her to have great things in her, Miss Tyrrell? I have only heard her once, remember."

Miss Tyrrell turned and laid a long, thin hand emphatically on the speaker's arm.

"Mr. Marsden," she said, "I believe her to be a genius. She has a feeling and an enthusiasm for the artistic, which I have never seen equalled. She absolutely lives for her art alone, and I have very little doubt that her artistic career will be positively triumphant. I shall be much surprised if she is not the sensation of next season. What delicacy, what force, what resource she has already!"

"Very true!" responded the gentleman thus harangued. His tone was somewhat absent, and his cogitations resulted, a moment later, in his saying, in a tone he had not yet used, a tone of serious, business-like interest: "Will Miss Malet recite again, or has she gone? I've not seen her about the room. Will you introduce me?"

"Oh, I do hope we may hear her again," added the Duchess, with quite new enthusiasm; "do bring her here, and let me make her acquaintance, my dear Miss Tyrrell."

Miss Tyrrell looked round the room.

"I hardly know whether she will recite again," she said, "she is very nervous and sensitive. I do not see her at this moment. But I will speak to my brother."

"There he is," returned the Duchess, "talking to those American girls. Mr. Tyrrell is never lost in a crowd."

The Duchess was right. There were men in the room taller, many men louder in talk and more lavish in gesture than their host; but there was that about John Tyrrell which seemed to act like a magnet on the consciousness of every one near him. He was a man of about three-and-forty, hardly above the average height, but admirably proportioned, and with a quiet unobtrusive grace of movement and gesture which is seldom seen in a man, except as the result of careful stage training. His face and head were very striking. Twenty years earlier, London—particularly feminine London—had raved about his beauty; his wonderful eyes, his perfect features, his admirable colouring had taken the public by storm. Behind all this physical perfection there had chanced to be a powerful and active brain, and everything that time had taken from him was more than compensated by the added strength, dignity, and intellectuality which it had brought. The smooth-shaven, perfectly-moulded mouth and chin—though there were people who said that John Tyrrell's

mouth was his worst point—were far stronger, and more striking in the man of three-and-forty, than they had been in the youth of three-and-twenty, the dark expressive eyes were no less attractive for the lines of thought which marked the forehead above them. The boy's manner had been fascinating; the man's manner was irresistible.

His sister threaded her way through the crowd, and touched him lightly on the arm.

"Come and speak to the Duchess," she said; "she is anxious to hear Selma again. Where is she?"

John Tyrrell laughed.

"Down in the tea-room being improved by Lady Dunstan," he said. "Where is the Duchess?"

The voice was the only one of the younger John Tyrrell's good points to which time had not been kind. Great as was the effect he could still produce with it on the stage, in familiar conversation, when he was at no special pains to control it, it was occasionally harder than he was in the least aware of.

He crossed the room with his sister, stayed for a few minutes talking to the Duchess, and then he left the room. As he disappeared, one of those curious magnetic currents by which such assemblages are sometimes touched, ran through the room, and everybody informed everybody else that Miss Selma Malet was going to recite again. There was a subdued murmur of expectancy, an eager, interested re-arrangement of groups, and then a sudden silence and stillness.

There was a curious, curved platform at one end of the room which had been designed by Miss Tyrrell for such occasions as the present. Two or three white leather chairs, shaped in imitation of the Greeks' stone seats, were placed upon it, several tall palms stood about, and the piano was rendered as Grecian as circumstances would allow by a leopard skin which was thrown across it. In the midst of these artistic incongruities, facing the fashionable, curious crowd, as the hush fell upon it, there stood a tall, girlish figure in a green gown. She paused a moment, motionless, every line of her simple, unconscious pose absolutely graceful with the natural grace of perfectly proportioned youth; and then her eyes, which had been a little shy, and even frightened, as they rested on the rows of faces before her, darkened and deepened, as she looked away into space,

the hot colour which had rushed to her cheeks in that moment of embarrassment, faded, and, with her lovely lips whitening moment by moment with the force of the passion her imagination created in her, she began to recite.

Her voice, low and intense as she began, rose and thrilled with emotion. The people before her were nothing to her, the occasion, the interest she excited were nothing to her, her very individuality was swept from her in her intense realisation of the burning lines she uttered. Her beautiful, sensitive face, quiveringly responsive to every shade of emotion, her delicate, expressive voice, and slight, graceful gesture seemed to be the natural and inevitable handmaidens of the genius within her—handmaidens of which she was utterly unconscious. She was utterly unconscious, also, of the charm they possessed for those who could have been touched by nothing deeper. Even in that well-dressed crowd there were two or three on whom the power in her laid an irresistible spell; but against the majority—never in favour of deep emotion—the passionate feeling beat itself in vain. Selma Malet was very beautiful, and very graceful; she was also John Tyrrell's protégée, and she was to be the sensation of next season; in all these capacities she was interesting, and the rows of curious, admiring faces remained curious and admiring to the end. But of the striving, consuming genius so near them, and so infinitely distant, they had no conception. Society can appraise talents, it worships success; genius in embryo it ignores or distrusts.

The broken, despairing voice ceased, the quivering face relaxed, the far-away gaze died out of the great, dark eyes, and Selma Malet moved hurriedly off the platform as the room filled with the sound of the polite applause which is all such an audience has to bestow. There was no one known to her near her as she came down into the room, and the girl was making rapidly and instinctively for the door, when a hand was laid upon her arm. She raised her eyes with a violent start; they were full of tears, and she was trembling from head to foot.

"Please let me go now," she murmured.

"One moment, Selma," returned John Tyrrell, "Mrs. Norman wishes to be introduced to you."

"Oh, please——"

But the girl broke off. A very old lady

with white hair, and eyes from which no years could steal the beauty, was standing close beside her.

"My dear," she said, kindly, taking the cold, shaking hand in both her own, "I will not keep you. I loved and worked at the art you have chosen for very many years before you were born, and I want to tell you what pleasure you have given me."

"I did so badly," faltered the girl.

Her voice, with the passion gone from it, was very musical and youthful.

"Yes, in one sense you did badly. You are very young, and your power is very great. It will take many years of hard work before you can do it justice."

All consciousness of herself and her surroundings seemed to fall away from Selma. She looked straight into the fine old face, without attempting to withdraw her hand, which trembled no longer.

"I know," she said, simply. "I mean to work."

"If you work, if your ambition is worthy of your genius, and your life is worthy of both, I think you will be the finest actress of your age. My dear, be true to yourself. Good-bye."

With a sudden impulse, strange and pretty to see in any one so old, the greatest actress of a generation past bent forward and kissed the girl on the forehead.

An hour later John Tyrrell, having seen the last of his guests depart, turned to his sister, who was sinking into the nearest seat with a sigh of relief.

"Very well done indeed, Sybilla," he said. "Flowers admirable, as usual, and the tea and things capitally managed. Did every one come?"

"I think so," answered his sister, languidly; "every one except Lady Fanshawe. I am glad you are satisfied."

"I really don't know why we asked Lady Fanshawe," returned her brother. "She's no use. Where is Selma?"

Miss Tyrrell looked round the room.

"I've no notion," she said. "I told her we would send her home. John, I think—though it is very touching to see the dear child so carried away—I really think she should try to be a little less—less—entêtée. I could hardly introduce her at all; and she seems to have nothing to say. An artist, even such a young one, should at least be able to talk of her art. She hardly understands the obligations of her position as yet. She might have made a far deeper impression this afternoon than

she has done, I'm afraid; and first impressions are so important to a young artist."

John Tyrrell looked at his sister with the faintest possible curl of the lip.

"I don't agree with you," he said. "She could hardly have done better if she had known what she was doing. You need not distress yourself, Sybilla; it won't last long, this absorption of hers. One season will make her all you could wish. By Jove! What a position she will have!"

He turned as he spoke, carelessly enough, and went out of the room, downstairs, and opened a door at the end of a long passage, leading into a small room, from which the fast-fading daylight had nearly departed.

It was difficult to say, at first sight, what there was about the room which gave an instantaneous impression that it belonged to a man. There were about it none of the usual characteristics. It was not untidy, nor was it bare; on the contrary, it was carefully fitted up with old oak; all the appointments were as tasteful as in a woman's sitting-room, the pictures on the walls—principally proof-engravings of famous pictures, with the artist's inscription to John Tyrrell—would have been quite as good company for an actress as for an actor. The only detail in the room which could by no possibility be connected with a woman was the writing-table, and that one feature stamped the whole room at once as the workshop of a practical man.

It seemed to its owner at first that the room was empty, and he paused on the threshold, with his hand on the lock.

"Selma!" he said.

There was a slight movement near the window, and Selma Malet, who was sitting in a great oak chair, hidden from him by its high, wide back, as she looked out at the evening sky, looked round to him.

"I am here," she said, softly, and there was a little tremble in her voice.

John Tyrrell shut the door, and, crossing the room, rested his arms on the back of the chair in which she sat.

"What are you doing here?" he said.

Selma rested her elbow on the arm of the chair, and leant her cheek on her hand.

"I—I wanted to think," she said. "I always think best in this room; I've learnt so much here. I'm afraid I must be stupid—really very stupid, you know."

"Why?"

"Because I do that thing so badly—oh, so badly. It seems as if all your help and teaching were of no use. I—I do try."

The low, girlish voice broke suspiciously, and the man looked down on her in silence for a moment, with a curve of his mouth which was half pity, half cynicism.

"Look up at me, Selma," he said. He waited until the girl turned her head and raised her eyes with a little, deprecating smile at the tears that filled them, and then he said: "You did not do badly. I have never heard you do better; and you pleased me very much."

A rush of bright colour swept over the sensitive, upturned face, and the eyes danced as the tears fell from them.

"Really? Really?" she cried, with an impulsive clasp of her hands on the arm of the chair. "Oh, if you are satisfied with me, I am happy always, because I know you know."

For one moment, as he met those almost worshipping young eyes, his own were touched with an indefinable expression which curiously suggested regret.

"Yes," he said, slowly, "yes, I do—know."

"And you really think—you're not vexed?—you really think I—can?"

The look, whatever it had meant, from whatever source it had sprung, disappeared from John Tyrrell's face. This ordinary expression was even accentuated, and his voice was perhaps harder than usual as he answered:

"I know you can. If you do as I tell you, you shall." He paused a moment, and then he asked, with a keen look at her: "You've not told me how you've enjoyed the afternoon?"

"The afternoon?" echoed Selma, vaguely. "Oh—the people! Well, I was so vexed with myself that I didn't think much. But now I do think about it—it sounds horribly rude—I'm afraid I haven't enjoyed it at all. Oh, Mrs. Norman was nice;" and the ready colour came into her cheeks again. "I love her! What did she mean, I wonder? Of course one means to work. And you really were pleased," she repeated, as she rose and stretched out her hands to him, impulsively. "Oh, I am the happiest girl in London. Now I must fly home, Helen will think I'm lost. I wish she could have come; she was so disappointed."

She looked, indeed, radiantly happy, as

she "flew," as she expressed it, upstairs to say good-bye to Miss Tyrrell, as she "flew" into a cab, and out again into a small house in Hampstead.

"Is Miss Helen in?" she asked the servant who opened the door. "Where is she? No, I won't have tea, thanks," and she ran lightly upstairs. "Helen!" she called; "Nell, Nell!"

A door on the landing above opened quickly, and another girl's voice, very like her own, but rather older and less exquisitely modulated, answered eagerly:

"I'm here, dear; come along;" and a short, bright-looking girl appeared at the top of the stairs.

Selma rushed up to her, and kissed her impetuously.

"I'm late," she said; "have you been in long, Nellie?"

"Not long," returned her sister. "Well, have you enjoyed it?"

"I'm in the seventh heaven," answered Selma. "Mr. Tyrrell was very pleased; really, very pleased, you know. I was very miserable. I thought I had done disgracefully. No, Nell, it isn't nonsense. You don't know how stupid I am; and then he was so nice. So I know it can't have been as bad as I thought, and I don't know what to do for joy."

They had passed into the drawing-room by this time, and Selma had gently pushed her sister into a chair, and was kneeling at her feet and looking into her face with shining, excited eyes. Quite suddenly she drew back a little, and her face changed.

"Helen!" she said, quickly. "Dear, has—has anything happened?"

Helen's face was flushed and trembling as she looked into the happy, eager face before her; and there was a look in her eyes which Selma had never seen there before.

"What is it, darling? What is it?" she repeated, softly, kissing the hands she held in both her own.

Her sister suddenly drew her very close and pressed her cheek against the dark, wavy hair.

"Humphrey," she whispered; "Humphrey. Selma, I am going to be his wife, dear."

With a little low cry of wonder and delight, Selma flung her arms impulsively round her sister's neck, and they clung together without a word in an embrace which was very close and very tender.

GRIZZLY DAN.

A COMPLETE STORY.

CHAPTER I.

A SHORT, slim, wiry, silent, strange man was Dan. A man who seemed out of place in Salt Flat, or, for the matter of that, out of place in any Western mining camp, at all. He could shoot, lie, or drink with any man in the camp; but his ways were not their ways. He never forced a quarrel, or cheated his friends—at least, not openly—and he was never known to be drunk. Lastly, he went about, not only in his own hat and coat—it was the custom in Salt Flat for these articles to change hands, whether at a bargain or otherwise, pretty often—but by his own name. This was looked upon by the rest of us almost as an insult. There was hardly a man among us there who hadn't some very good reason to keep his real name as much as possible in the background. Joe Carr, the bar tender—whose real name was Joe Palmer—was universally accounted one of our foremost citizens, and an excellent fellow—as we went—but his best friend would have fought shy indeed of addressing him as Palmer. I had heard him called many names, some of which would have given ground for libel actions in England ten times over; nay, I have myself called him thief—with a prefix—and he did not seem much hurt; but never that. So it was a sore point with us all that Grizzly Dan should thus insinuate a superiority that none of us would allow.

"He mought ha' tacked on another name," said Frank Menner, our butcher, "from back East," as he was careful to inform us on every possible occasion, "when he come here, if it was only to be sociable. You say old Jim at the saw-mill knew his father down in Missouri, and his name was Hunter there, too. Wal, maybe so, maybe so," he added, reflectively; "but he arn't the only good man among us, not even the best by a long way; likely he find so some day. We didn't go much on 'sass' back East, and there was generally some one put the kabosh* on it before long."

I think, though, Menner must have been the only one of us that actually bore Dan enmity. The quiet and soberness of the man angered us at times—when we felt more than usually below his level—as much as this

* Put the kabosh, that is, put a summary stop to it.

very "nominal" matter ever did; but we most of us liked him individually. He was always welcome, and always ready, too, to play in a table of euchre or "all-fours," though he seldom played high and always on the square, and if it had not been for public opinion he would have had more than one opportunity of going partners with men who worked the more paying claims higher up the gulch. As it was, he seemed well enough content. He worked his one claim alone, and though it paid little or nothing, he never borrowed or ran up bills.

He had not been among us long before there came to Salt Flat a party—husband, wife, and child—from Michigan. They came well "heeled," with cattle and horses, and settled in Salt Flat, to rest before crossing the range into California. Mr. Bollen, as we all called him from the first, on account of his—to us—aristocratic looks and ways, and his thousand dollars in cattle and horses, was hail-fellow-well-met at once, and Salt Flat seemed almost self-sacrificing in helping him with his herding, and getting his family fixed. There was no room for wonder. To us miners, working and living together, with little female companionship, the advent of Jenny Bollen was an event that sent most of us into a very pleasurable state of excitement. It acted upon us in different ways.

It was early winter, and the night after Mr. Bollen's arrival, the one saloon of Salt Flat contained the entire population of the camp. Mr. Bollen's two cow-boys were there, too, and so many times were they called upon to drink, and so many questions were they asked, that, at two o'clock, thinking discretion the better part of valour, they apologised for having to leave so early, and retired unsteadily to the waggon. Bill and Harry Welch, after arguing for nearly an hour over the colour of Jenny's hair, came to blows, and were forcibly ejected by the rest of us, and stuck head downwards in the snow. We sat late that night, or rather morning, discussing Jenny's virtues. After mature, though rather vehement, deliberation, the following resolutions were unanimously carried:

"That her eyes were like rock crystal. That her hair was better nor Mrs. Snaggles—the wife of our uncertificated doctor. That she was between sixteen and twenty-four"—on this delicate question scarcely two of us agreed. "That her face was 'a pictur.'"

But Mrs. Snaggles or no Mrs. Snaggles—who, after all, could only provoke comparison in the unimportant item of hair—Jenny Bollen was undoubtedly a very pretty girl, and there were two men in the camp, at least, who had already fallen—after their fashion—very much in love with her. These were Frank Menner and Grizzly Dan. Frank "made the running" from the first, and though Jenny laughed at them both, it was clear she liked Frank the better of the two. There was little time, however, even for such scant courtship as men in Salt Flat thought necessary.

Mr. Bollen struck his tent, loaded his waggon, and passed on over the great Divide, with his horses, his cattle, his wife, and his daughter. Two or three of us took upon ourselves, as many other people have done before, to offer rough sympathy and gratuitous advice.

"Struck a snag, ain't you, Frank? But don't you cave, my boy, plenty more where she come from."

"Hello, Frank," said another, "sorry the gal made a fool of you; better luck next time. You see gals think so much about the looks of a feller."

But he was soon silenced.

"I reckon you chaps," drawled Frank, "thinks as yu know all about most things, and Jenny and me in partic'lar. But you've let the dollar drop this time. You are right about looks, Josh; old Bollen wouldn't ha' gone off so quick on'y he saw your face, and was afeard the heifers might stampede. See here," and he threw us a little note.

I caught it, and looked at the address. It was marked, "Frank. Butcher. Salt Flat." He had evidently forgotten to tell her his surname. It was written on the merest scrap of paper. Cattle dealers don't carry around portfolios in the West of Colorado. But it was folded in what was to us a most remarkable manner, so remarkable that it took us some time to get the creases out and read its contents, while Frank leaned back against his sign-board—F. Menner, Butcher, from the East—with all the careless nonchalance that a five-cent cigar and an easy attitude could lend to his appearance. After much difficulty we spelled out the following:

"We shall be at Oretown to-morrow. There is a church there. "JENNY."

We handed back the note without attempting to refold it.

"I guess you han't read it yet yourself,"

said Josh, thinking of the difficulty we had experienced.

"Read it? Gals always fix letters so back East. I'm off ter-morrer," said Frank, stuffing the little note into his pocket, as if it was only one among many that he had already received.

"Stage goes to-night," we suggested.

"Maybe; but, you see, I am going to marry now, and mustn't chuck my dollars away on feeding Nathan's horses this trip."

So, in another hour, the story had gone abroad that Frank was going to Oretown to bring back Miss Bollen as his wife, and needed money, and Salt Flat had made a very solid collection for him. It was nothing if not miscellaneous; some contributed their washings of gold-ore for that day; some, in default of the "ready," gave a note of hand; others money; while among the various subscriptions were a pipe and a pair of shaps. But Frank was more than satisfied, and thanked us all heartily, and that evening he started for Oretown by the stage. All Salt Flat turned out to see him off, and just as the driver was gathering up his reins preparatory to giving the deafening crack of his long whip, which was the signal to the half-broken bronchos to leap into a gallop for the start, Grizzly Dan stepped out of the crowd.

"Frank," he said, "I hain't got nothing to put in the bag to-day; but maybe I'll strike ile by when you gets back, and if so, I'll get you a wedding present then."

"I want no wedding present from you, Dan Hunter; I shan't mind getting no welcome from you; and I guess you won't feel much to give away. When we have settled down a bit you can come and give my wife your congratulations."

Frank was standing up in the old wagon, which did duty as a stage, his eyes glittering with hate, and his whole face working with jealousy even now; but he failed to raise even the least spark of anger in Dan's face.

Then the whip cracked, the horses sprang into motion, and the lumbering stage-wagon rolled out of sight.

Dan did not appear at Simpson's saloon for some days after this, and we were getting to wonder what he was doing, when, one evening, he walked into the "Salt Flat General Store," where I and some others were sitting at the stove, and said:

"Boys, I've struck it."

We jumped to our feet, and shook his hand cordially. Public feeling had had a reaction. Most of us thought, after that day when Frank went off on the stage, that Dan would have made Jenny the better husband, while all the camp was in a ferment over the discussion as to which was "the best man"; for that Frank and Dan would fight some day—unless one or other should show the white feather—there was every likelihood. Bets and wagers were freely made, and Dan was made favourite—with pistols—at three to two. So that we were not sorry that he had got a slice of luck at last.

"'Tain't much, boys," he went on; "but I wish it had come sooner. I reckon it's the end of the old lead Myers struck last fall, down by the creek."

It was not many days after this that Frank and Mrs. Menner came back to the Flat. They had spent some time together at Oretown, and old Bollen had given Jenny twenty head of prime cattle to take back with her. For some time all went smoothly. Jenny was not demonstrative, but on the whole they were an affectionate couple; but towards the end of winter, things began to tone down. Jenny was observed to fail in her spirits, and Dan, of course, noticed it. He seldom spoke to her, and when he did, it was only as any other of us. But she made it very clear that, next to her husband, she looked on him as her best friend in Salt Flat. Frank Menner was consumed with jealousy. At last the first meeting took place. It occurred, of course, in the Salt Flat saloon. High words had passed from Frank to Dan, and Dan had quietly sipped the abominable mixture that was sold as whisky—finest old rye—and said nothing. At last Menner, emboldened by the other's silence, threatened him.

"And see here, Dan Hunter, if I catch you sneaking around my wife again, I'll cut out your liver where you stand. You may do as you like about other fellows' wives; but you shall not hang after mine."

Dan dropped his glass to the floor where it broke into twenty pieces. For a moment his hand sought the pistol at his side. Then he withdrew it quickly, while his face for once showed signs of a greater anger than he could command. With clenched fist he strode to where Frank was standing. The latter was not slow to seize his advantage. In an instant he had drawn a revolver and fired. At the same

moment Dan struck him. There was a dull thud as a heavy body fell to the ground, and, as the smoke cleared, we saw that Frank lay stunned upon the sanded floor of the saloon, while Dan, his left arm hanging limp and shattered to his side, stood above him. Planting one foot heavily on his antagonist's body, he strode over him, and in total silence we saw him walk towards his claim by the river till the last house in Salt Flat's one street hid his retiring form.

CHAPTER II.

AFTER the row at Simpson's saloon, there was a truce to open hostilities for some time. It was generally felt, and no doubt Frank knew it himself, too, that Dan could have killed him if he had wished. The lightning-like rapidity with which his hand, dropping the glass, had flown to his revolver, before Frank had had time to make a movement, was evidence enough of this. But there was another reason for the deceptive calm that fell over the camp. Western morality is lax, and its law, in many cases, entirely in the hands of Judge Lynch; but we were not disposed to allow any but fair fighting. Dan kept himself very much to himself. He never referred to the cause of his broken arm; and though he could not at present work his claim, he had already taken out a very tolerable pile, and had no need to do so. Frank came down twice a week as usual to the store to see if any beef was wanted, but his reception was never a very hearty one.

"The boys hev been getting among the deer lately. We shan't want beef again till blacktail and elk play out."

So Frank thrust his hands a little deeper into his pockets, and went off whistling to his cabin by the creek. But sometimes, though he would deny it to himself furiously, the thought would strike him that he was not at home with his wife; that he had married too far above him. Neither in word nor deed could he find reason to reproach Jenny, however. She was not as affectionate as she might have been in her ways, perhaps; but he did not look for that. Indeed, it would have bored him. But he felt that he was too rough for her, and even in his language he would sometimes forget that he was not in Simpson's saloon, and shock the poor girl's ears with some profanity. At such times he would remember how her father had fought against the match — had

threatened never to speak to his daughter again, and how she, sacrificing much and braving all, had yet married him in her father's teeth. Then he would throw himself passionately on his knees by her side, strong man as he was, and in broken words beg and implore her to forgive him. The very vehemence of his repentance frightened the girl, and made her even more afraid of him; and she would sit leaning back, with her hands clasped tightly over her heart, and looking with far-away, frightened eyes at him kneeling there at her feet.

"Oh, yes, yes; but, Frank, don't say such things to me again."

And there was a deadlier danger yet; a worse than Damocles' sword hanging over his head, a demon that whispered mockingly in his ear: "All this is nothing; wait — wait till you have hurt her worse, and you will be powerless to seek the forgiveness that she could never give you."

Day after day he had passed the sign, "Simpson's Forty Rod Whiskey," outside Salt Flat saloon, and tried to accustom himself to looking on the burning letters, and the laughing crowd within, to hear the clink of the glasses and the rattle of the dice, and to think of them as things that had nothing to do with him. He had long ago finished the little keg of finest old rye in his cabin, taking it sip by sip when temptation became too strong for him; but the last few days' total abstemiousness had told upon even his powerful constitution, and this evening, as he was walking home, a sickness overcame him, and he staggered, and fell heavily on the snow-covered ground.

There we found him, and carried him back to the saloon he had been so anxious to avoid, and forced brandy between his lips. But it was a long time before the many doses administered had their effect and Frank opened his eyes at last.

His eyes stared blankly before him, so they gave him more brandy; and then, when at last he rose, with their help, to his feet, and wished to go, they would not hear of it till he had sat down and rested.

"Take a drink, old chap, and tell us about it," they insisted.

It was a long "rest" that Frank took that night in Simpson's saloon. Towards midnight he began to look less pale and ill. A bright colour shone in his face, and a fierce light in his eyes. He asked where Dan was.

"Ain't bin nigh the town but once since—you know," they told him.

Then, looking round at the familiar decorations (!) on the walls, and the old thumb-worn dice-boxes on the table before him, he said:

"Seems like old times, boys, to-night; like as if I had been dreaming the last month or two. Shake you drinks, Tom?"

The dice were brought, and the game, if such it could be called, went on for some time. Now they shook for money; and Frank lost. But still he played higher. Then he lost his horses; then his wife's cattle.

"Come, Frank, you've had enough for to-night," said one well-meaning miner.

But a fierce oath was the only answer; and the one man who tried that night to save Frank Menner shrugged his shoulders and left the saloon.

"See here, fellers, any man 'ut 'll back his claim against mine—any man in'r room."

And again he lost. Still he did not go. He had seven or eight dollars in silver still. The bar stood by his elbow. He was thirsty.

When Frank returned home in the grey of the morning it was leaning on the arms of two companions, to find the light burning still in one window there. Jenny was sitting up, watching, wondering, fearing. Frank saw it, and for a moment stood up without help, a shuddering horror seizing him. The other two cast significant looks at one another and slunk back the way they had come.

"He'll do now, he can stand alone all right," was the thought with which they strove to excuse their desertion.

It was never thoroughly known in Salt Flat what happened during the early hours of that fatal morning down at the cabin by the creek; but Bill Welch, and Doc Snaggles, returning from a round through the woods before breakfast in search of game, heard several rifle-shots in quick succession down among the foothills, and, having had little luck themselves, took the trail leading in that direction, in hopes that they might get a shot at any deer being driven up. But none was to be seen. When they came out on to the level they saw a strange thing. A man, hatless, pale, and reeling unsteadily, stood among the thick tuft grass at the edge of the foothills, gesticulating and flourishing a smoking rifle. Around him lay some five

or six dead or dying cattle, and close by the side of the trail they had been following, a young bull, the pride of all Bollen's herd of shorthorns, lay, his shoulder broken by a shot, struggling painfully to rise, and filling the air with his piteous bellowings. Even as they stepped forward, another bullet, striking him in the back, ended his tortures, and the poor brute fell back dead. At this moment the man, turning round, saw them, and throwing his gun over his shoulder began rapidly ascending the hill. When he had nearly reached the top he turned, and shaking his clenched fist at them, poured out a torrent of abuse and profanity.

"Take your cursed cattle," he cried; "hoofs and hides are all you will get by me," and he recommenced climbing, more furiously than ever, the thick patches of brush and cotton-wood hiding him from sight.

"Come, mate," said Bill, shaking with suppressed anger, as much at the man's wanton cruelty as at his language to them—of which latter, indeed, so furiously and indistinctly had he spoken, little save the end had been intelligible—"we must fetch this news to camp. Let's make tracks sharp. Who do you reckon it war?"

"Frank Menner. I saw his face as he went over the hill. Bin on the tear, I reckon."

Bill whistled.

"Phew, what'll Jenny say, I wonder?"

"I calc'late she won't 'ave much more to say to that skunk. Did you hear what he gave us?"

"I heard plenty—enough for Bill. I reckon if that chap comes mooching around Salt Flat this side of Christmas there'll be two of us what'll have something to say to him—you bet your bottom dollar on that. Guess thar ain't no flies on you nor me."

So in a short time the little community were eagerly discussing this new act in the drama that was being played in their midst, while not a few went up to the foothills to see with their own eyes the dead cattle and the trail Frank had taken. Some of them, those who were best on a trail, followed him for a mile or more, and returned with the news that he had broken off into the dense pine-woods on the slopes of Hamlin's Peak, where further tracking was impossible. It was evident that he had taken to the woods to hide, there being no trail in that direction by which he could cross the range, and all that could be done now was to hurry back to the cabin by the

creek, and see what awaited them there. There was a little crowd already assembled round the door, and Joe Carr held up his finger to the new-comers to enjoin silence.

"We sent Grizzly Dan in," he whispered; "he'll let us know if we're wanted."

Silently and quickly they took their places among the others and waited. Big, bearded men, wild, reckless, gambling natures—men who had most of them heavy sins on their consciences, and who acknowledged no sentiment, and perhaps had never before felt anxiety on any but their own account, stood there, troubled, anxious, and pale, waiting for Grizzly Dan to come back and tell them the worst. Presently he appeared. His face was drawn and haggard, and he did not seem to look towards them.

"Doc" Snaggles stepped quickly forward, and when he reached the door he dropped his hat on the ground outside before crossing with noiseless steps the threshold of the little cabin. When he came back at last, he answered at once the unspoken question of the crowd:

"No, not dead; she'll come round presently. If you chaps'll hurry back to the Flat, and get some brandy and tinned fruit, you'll maybe do more good than standing around here. But I'm afraid she's a rough time coming, poor gal. Dan'll stay and help me all I want."

So the rest of us went back to the Flat, and sent down all the delicacies—such as they were—that our "general store" would yield. Indeed, if it had not been for some of the more reasonable among us, who suggested that Jenny had "a small appetite, anyway," the little cabin would hardly have held the miscellaneous supplies we wished to contribute. Even so, there was not a man in camp whose sympathy was not represented in the offerings that Harry Welch took down to the sick girl, who, for all we knew, had suffered grievous injury at the hands of her fugitive husband. Doc Snaggles met him at the door, and, signing to him to put down the hampers outside, led him round to where the window of the new room looked out on the half-frozen stream and the snow-burdened hills beyond. On tip-toe they went forward, and saw Jenny lying, very pale, her head resting on Dan's arm and talking rapidly. She was looking straight towards them, but seemed unconscious of their presence. The two men looked at each other.

"Yes, delirium. Come in; she won't know you. When's Mrs. Snaggles coming down?"

"She'll be here right away. Say, Doc, you don't think she'll die, do you?"

"If it was you or Bill, boy, I should say no; but she ain't no tough 'un, like us. She's been bad, and she'll be a durned sight was yet."

So they came in, and began moving aimlessly about the little room, "fixing things," as Doc said. Jenny was quieter now. Dan sat, with his head buried in his hands, in the silence that was more than words. Now and again he would look towards the girl at his side, to assure himself that this sudden stillness was really another interval of sleep, and not the death he so much dreaded. When he did so they could see how drawn and pinched with horror was his own face. Only Doc Snaggles knew what he must have suffered that last hour, sitting silently in the same place, listening to the girl for whom he would willingly have sacrificed his life, repainting unconsciously the miserable details of the past night. Only Doc could, even if he had wished, have told how Dan, when he first saw her body lying on the cold floor of the little parlour, had thrown himself wildly at her side, and, with a passionate emotion of which no man would have thought him capable, bathed her poor, heated forehead with his tears, and then, rising suddenly to his feet, had invoked Heaven's awful curse upon the man who had done this thing.

CHAPTER III.

MRS. SNAGGLES came soon after; and, while Doc went out to meet her, Jenny began to speak again. Dan bent over her to catch the words. Presently there came a pause. She did not seem to see him, looking straight through the window to where the old waggon trailed over the range to Oretown. But a softer look came into her face when she next spoke:

"Dan."

A wild thrill of joy swept through him in spite of all his misery. He bent his head a little lower, and for a moment his lips touched her face.

When the others came into the room again, they saw a new light in Dan's eyes; and when Doc told him that he would no longer be needed that day, he grasped his hand and shook it.

"You will do your best, Doc, I know."

Think as if it was your wife—your own wife that you'd die for—you are trying to save. Oh, she must get well! she must get well!"

Harry Welch walked with him as far as the ford, where their ways parted, and Dan spoke for the first time since they left the cabin:

"Tell the boys," he said, "to let Frank be. You see, he is her husband still, I suppose. Unless," he added, significantly, "unless he comes back agen."

And we followed, if we did not understand his wish. I think that since it was clear now that Frank had gone—"va-moosed," as we said—we all looked upon Dan as having a certain right in the matter; and certainly our sympathies, which were, after all, as ready as they were rough, were entirely with the man who had been so faithful to Jenny all through; who had been so far above Frank's jealousy and spitefulness, and was even now so generous to the man who had robbed him of his love, and whom he must in his heart have hated with a deadly hatred. Indeed, his feelings in this matter, his anxiety that no violence nor harm should be done to Frank, simply because he was Jenny's husband, were unintelligible to us; but we respected them, and the man also for them. Never a day passed but Dan was up at the house, asking for news of Jenny; and the relief he showed in his anxious face when Mrs. Snaggles would tell him she wasn't no worse, anyway, enlisted that good woman's sympathies to such an extent that she would sometimes let him come to the door and look in for a few minutes, before he went back to his claim.

The latter was showing up well, and Dan worked at it for more than the usual hours, and a great deal harder. Severe manual labour did him good, and this and the delicate handling necessary for washing out the gold, saved him perhaps from breaking down under the anxiety that lay so heavily upon him. At night he would stroll up to the Flat and join in a game of euchre; but he made an inattentive player; and once Joe Carr, standing behind him, saw him quite unconsciously discard a left bower in exchange for a nine. After a little he would get up, a trifle lighter in pocket, nod to the boys, and go off to his cabin, generally to sleep the sleep of sheer exhaustion.

One day Doc Snaggles came riding into the Flat with news. Jenny had come more to herself, and was out of danger.

"But there's something I don't rightly ketch on to," he said. "She knows me and my wife, but she don't seem right in her ideas. She hain't said nothin' about that night—don't remember the first thing about it, I reckon—and she's always asking where Frank is, and why he don't come home. She says she saw him often while she had the fever, but don't call to mind what he said to her. Maybe she'd get a bit clearer if she saw Dan."

So Dan was sent for, and told that Doc wanted him down at the cabin. The Snaggleses were both in the parlour when he got there, and Jenny was sitting up in a chair by the table, and, pillows being scarce in Salt Flat, was propped up with a curious selection of furs and blankets. She looked terribly pale and ill, but there was a vacant expression in her soft brown eyes—a something wanting, as it were—which spoke worse for the poor girl's mind. She did not wait for Dan to speak. As soon as he was well within the room, and she could see his face, she held out her hands to him with a glad little cry.

"Oh, Frank! Frank! you have come back at last. Why have you kept away from me? I have been so ill; and I saw you every day——"

"Jenny, it is not Frank—only Grizzly Dan."

But she did not heed him.

"You are going to stay now, aren't you, dear? And we'll be happy again, like we were before—before—something happened. What was it, Frank, that happened?"

"I can't, Jenny, I can't. You mustn't talk like that. I will come and see you to-morrow, and——"

"Frank's got to go to Oretown, Jenny, after stores," Mrs. Snaggles hurriedly interposed, "and must catch the stage. He'll get back soon, and you'll be better then."

"Git away, you fool," she whispered to Dan, brushing quickly past him, "this'll bring back the fever."

So Dan stumbled out of the room, his eyes wet with a strange mist of tears. Half unconsciously he found his way to his own cabin, where, throwing himself on his knees on the bare mud floor, he prayed as he had perhaps not done since he was a boy in Missouri.

"Takes me for him!" he cried. "Oh, Heaven, help me to help her, for I love her still, love her more than ever!"

Salt Flat, of course, heard—through

Mrs. Snaggles—of the scene in Menner's parlour, and many were the opinions delivered as to the course Dan should take. The majority, judging others by themselves, agreed that Dan should marry Jenny "right off" since she looked on him as her husband, if he wanted to, and ignore Frank, as a man who, if he was not dead, ought to be. But Dan became so furious at the suggestion, that the idea was at once dropped as a subject which, if persevered with, would in all likelihood end in shooting.

"Boys," he said, "I'm not that sort, I reckon. There is on'y one way out of this for Dan Hunter, and that's the California trail. You chaps as like can 'freeze out' for my claim, and if the feller as gits it will give me a broncho I'll git through before next snowfall. That's fixed."

Dan tried hard to keep away from Menner's cabin that day; but as the evening came, and he remembered how he had always gone to enquire after Jenny after his day's work, he found he could not resist taking the same direction once more.

"It's a sure thing," he said to himself, as he set out, "I can't skip the country without a word. Jenny, my dear, you'll never know how fond Grizzly Dan was of you."

When he got to the cabin, and asked Mrs. Snaggles how Jenny was, she shook her head.

"She's got 'er mind fixed on it you're Frank," she said, and she seemed quite determined not to allow him to see her.

"Maybe she won't see me again," said Dan, "I'm going over the range."

"For good?"

"Ay."

He could say no more, a lump seemed to stick in his throat as he looked piteously at her. She did not hesitate any longer.

"I'm real sorry for you, Dan," she said, as she let him in, and she left him, and went off to the kitchen. When she got back she could hear Jenny sobbing bitterly inside. Bill Welch, who had come round to enquire, stood outside the door with Dan. For a moment she looked angrily at the latter; but a glance at his face stopped her.

"Good-bye," she said, holding out her hand, "good-bye."

And the two figures moved away into the gathering darkness. Their way lay across the meadow-land, under the foothills, where Frank Menner had shot his

cattle a fortnight before. The coyotes had made short work of the carcasses, and presently, as they went silently along through the crisp snow, they saw the skull of the young bull lying in their path by a small clump of aspen trees. For a moment they stopped and looked at it, each thinking of the man who had done so much wrong and harm in the last few months. Suddenly, without a sign of warning, he stood before them. He wore no hat, and his clothes were torn about him. Mad, fierce, and shaken with fury, he stood there and laughed aloud.

"Caught, you hound," he cried, "coming from my house—coming from my wife."

He raised the pistol in his hand, and fired wildly. Dan's hat fell to the ground. Bill Welch looked hurriedly towards him. Was the man mad? He stood there, his hands folded over his breast, silent and immoveable. Again Frank stepped forward and raised his weapon, when in an instant his foot caught in one of the horns of the animal he had killed, and he fell headlong on his face. At the same instant the second cartridge exploded. A cry, sharp, clear, and piercing, rang out on the frosty night air, and when Bill went forward and turned over his body he saw there was blood trickling from the man's side. Dead! Shot through the heart by the bullet he had intended for his rival.

Salt Flat is no more; but down on the creek, where Grizzly Dan's cabin used to stand, there is a neat little white house, and Dan and his wife are well known in Oretown, and for many miles around. She still calls him Frank, and often sits by the hour puzzling over her "second marriage," and trying—trying to "remember." But she is happy, and men say that Dan is happy too. There is a rough grave among the foothills where she is never likely to pass, and a still rougher headstone. A plain piece of deal boarding stands upright in the soil—still faintly bearing the epitaph the miners of Salt Flat deemed sufficient:

"'Frank Menner'
shot himself,
the other was the best man."

CURIOS OF THE QUEEN'S ENGLISH.

Now and then one comes across very strange examples of "English" composition. These may be said to vary from

the form well known as slipshod, to the extraordinary results of dictionary consultation by foreigners. From our Indian Empire we occasionally get some choice instances of the latter kind of writing. According to Lady Dufferin, a colonel once received a letter from a native beginning "Honoured Enormity"; and the correspondent had, no doubt, looked in the dictionary, and considered this method of expression eminently suitable.

The same writer tells us that during an examination a man was instructed to write an essay about the horse. This he did in brief terms; in fact, in a single sentence, which ran: "The horse is a very noble animal, but when irritated he ceases to do so." Another student of our mother tongue's peculiarities had to write upon the difference between riches and poverty. He entered more fully than the above man into his subject, and summed up his disquisition with the remarkable assertion: "In short, the rich man welters on crimson velvet, while the poor man snorts on flint." We leave the intelligent reader to consider the meaning of particularly the concluding portion of this statement.

We have just experienced a somewhat humid summer; and it is interesting to note that distant climes have also been complaining of an even more distressing condition of the weather, as witness the following extract from the Allahabad "Morning Post," of date two or three months back:

"On the 3rd inst. at 1 p.m. there was a heavy tempest of a dreadful wind, and it is followed by a downpour of heavy rain. The great nalla, which flows through the heart of the town, came into heavy flood, so that almost all the adjacent houses were for a long time in water, the poor dwellers were in great catastrophe, and they were deeply drowned in the whirlpool of difficulties to escape from the threatening danger. Some wretched people took refuge in the highest and uppermost part of their houses; I am poured into the horrible imagination and sorry still to give a most terrible account of a poor and wretched pair of fakir, who was flowed to the distance of a quarter of a mile, but fortunately caught by the trees, and thus they have saved their lives. In short, the people of Burwan greatly suffered in this stormy tempest."

Then the writer finishes his graphic tale by entering into the financial losses sustained through the above "heavy tempest."

Japanese "English," however, is at least as intricate in its style as the above examples. A firm, dealing in fishing-tackle, having sent a circular to a merchant in Tokio, Japan, received the following communication:

"DEAR SIR IN YOURS,—We should present to your company the bamboo fishing-rod, a net-basket, and a reel, as we have just convenience; all those were very rough and simple to you laughing for your kind reply which you sent us the catalogue of fishing-tackles last, etc. Wishing we that now at Japan there it was not in prevailing fish gaming, but fishermen, in scarcely there now, but we do not measure how the progression of the germ of the fishing game beforehand. Therefore, we may yield of feeling to restock in my store, your country's fishing-tackle, etc. Should you have the kindness to send a such farther country's even in a few partake when we send the money in ordering of them, should you?"

"I am yours, yours truly —."

It would appear that the writer, through a "yielding of feeling"—whatever that may be—is inclined to give an order. Also, he hopes for a developement of sport in the form of "fishing game" in Japan.

Writing of Japan reminds us of the prospectus of the Coolie Contracted Company, which was recently issued from the town of Yokohama in that region. "The object of the company," it appears, "is to evacuate an evil conduct of the coolies, which had been practised during many years, while we will reform their bad circumstances. As the object is the above, we will open the works very quickly and kindly as we possible, without any measure more or less." The company promises to undertake such business as, "transactions of general goods relating to marine, land, and house removal—a accompanying man in going and coming of funeral rite and marriage ceremonies."

It is not necessary, however, to go so far as Japan for curiosities of this sort. Last summer the Hopsburger Hof, in Bavaria, announced the possession of a "pompous garden of restauration"; while the Bavarian State Railway issued the notice: "Following plays will be performed over the following days, when a certain number a larger company of new-strangers-visitors could no more obtain tickets for the principal play. Each such a following play will be announced whenever possible. Single as well as turn and return tickets

can be paid for at all Bavarian stations. Tickets for the Round of Travel just so for backforwarding of the luggage direct dispatch will take place at Market Oberammergau!" In this the concluding note of exclamation is amusing.

A school in Frankfort not long ago announced in English, "Swimming instructions given by a teacher of both sexes." And is there not just a shade of suspicion that the following sentence in a Review was the work of a German pen? "Mr. Rudyard Kipling furnishes a brilliant but too melodramatic to be what is apparently meant to be realistic, contribution."

At a coal-crushing apparatus shown in the Belgian section of the Edinburgh Exhibition, was posted up the statement: "Having been struck with the inconveniences resulting from the cleaning of coals by the humid way, I endeavoured to find out a process by the dry. In the beginning I had recourse to the air which gave directly satisfactory results, but their regularity was subordinate to multiple circumstance." At a later stage in his experiments the exhibitor "Searched an apparatus which might have influence on the materials according to the friability of the same, and whilst pulverising separate useful from the strange materials"—went on through processes curious enough, but scarcely more extraordinary than the account given of them.

It is stated on good authority that, within recent times, on the main road near Canterbury, was the notice: "Traction engines and other persons taking water from this pond will be prosecuted;" while, about thirty years ago, the following announcement might have been seen at Tynemouth: "Visitors are cautioned against bathing within a hundred yards of this spot, several persons having been drowned here lately by order of the authorities." An eating-house near the docks had the notice: "Sailors' vitals cooked here;" and the following announcement was, many years ago, placed on Hammersmith Bridge: "No persons are allowed to remain on the bridge, and are requested to pass on." With reference to this, "Punch" asked: "If persons are requested to pass on, and yet not allowed to remain on the bridge, are there policemen in attendance to collar them and walk them over without stopping?"

Within the past few months a new magazine was started in a Northern city. The opening article said: "We shall not

pay exclusive homage to the mighty in intellect, but to any one who honour us with contributions, whether in philosophy, poetry, or general literature, from anything original in design, profound in thought, beautiful in imagination, or delicate in expression will be considered worthy of a place in this magazine." Perhaps the ability of the printers was not equal to the ambition of the projectors of the above periodical—if ever it became "periodic."

The "Poll-Book" of the Liverpool Election, published in June, 1790, contains—says a writer in "Notes and Queries"—this curious notice: "T. Johnson having promised an errata, but from the anxiety of the public, has published in its present state, hoping few errors will be found; and will be thankful to those, who may find mistakes to intimate them to him, as they shall be rectified gratis, which may be conveniently added to the end of the 'book.'"

A picturesque interviewer in an American paper, giving a description of Cardinal Gibbons, said that his red biretta "shows beneath his Roman collar like a red cravat." This, remarked an English contemporary, "is like saying that a man wears his hat under his waistcoat, or his smoking-cap round his neck."

CONCERNING THE CENSUS.

SUNDAY, the fifth of April next, is fixed as the date for the tenth decennial census of the inhabitants of the United Kingdom, and on the following day there will be collected in England, Wales, and Scotland the particulars of the population living on the night of census day. In Ireland, owing to a different method of enumeration, the work of taking the census cannot be accomplished in one day, and provision is made for its performance within a period to be fixed by the Lord Lieutenant.

The population returns, compiled prior to the present century, are far from reliable, being merely conjectural, and having no better basis than the payment of poll-tax and similar imposts. No systematic enumeration took place before 1801, and some account of the development of the census, and the circumstances under which it was initiated, may not be out of place now.

In the year 1753, a bill, which from the fact of its being backed by sundry members of the Government, in addition to private

members, appears to have had the support of the Ministry, was introduced into the House of Commons, for taking and registering an annual account of the total number of the people, of the marriages, births, and deaths, and of all persons in receipt of parochial relief. The alarm and vehement opposition with which the Bill was met, probably surprised its supporters as much as we, in these latter days, are amused at the violent language and curious arguments attending its debate. It was actually feared by some that an epidemic of disease, or a national misfortune, would follow the numbering; military authorities argued that such a register would demonstrate our weakness to foreign enemies; the proposal was described as totally subversive of the last remains of English liberty, and it was looked upon suspiciously as likely to provide a basis for new taxation. Conscription, too, was scented, and this was perhaps warranted by the register being advocated as necessary in the event of a serious war, when, failing a supply of voluntary recruits, the furnishing of a certain number would be compulsory on every parish. Notwithstanding opposition, the Bill was passed by the Commons, but thrown out by the Lords on the second reading, and nothing more was heard of the proposal until nearly fifty years had elapsed.

Meantime the population had increased by leaps and bounds, and in the year 1800, when a new census bill was introduced, the public mind was agitated, not by the fear of our impotence to furnish an adequate army, but by the apprehension that the means of subsistence were not increasing in ratio to the rapid growth of population. Parliament was occupied in discussing the prevalent dearth of food, while the Malthusian doctrines, advanced about this time, attracted a large measure of attention. Public opinion generally had changed in favour of an enumeration of the people, and the bill became law without opposition. The first census was taken on the eighteenth of March, 1801, and has been uninterruptedly repeated ever since in the first year of each successive decennary.

In England and Wales the Local Government Board is the central authority for taking the census, the Registrar General being the directing officer. In the first four censuses the actual enumerators were the overseers of the poor, who were selected as being the only agents

available. They collected information as to the inhabitants of their parishes by personal enquiry, in whatever manner they deemed best, and on that data formulated their returns. Their process of enumeration was confined to no definite period, with the result that the same people present in different parishes on different days were in all likelihood counted more than once.

With the 1841 census dawned a new era in enumeration. The Registration Act had shortly before come into operation, and for the purposes of that Act and the new Poor Law the whole country was divided into districts with superintendent registrars, and sub-districts with resident registrars, upon the latter of whom devolved the duty of registering the births and deaths within their sub-districts. No more suitable organisation could be found for the purposes of enumeration, and to its machinery was transferred the business of the census. Every registrar is required to parcel out his sub-district into divisions each of a size capable of house-to-house visitation by a single person in the course of one day, and to make a list of qualified persons to act as enumerators, whose appointment rests with the superintendent registrar. The householder's duty in the matter is probably well known; but a brief recital of it, with a reminder that its wilful neglect is attended with a pecuniary penalty, may be useful.

In the course of the week prior to the census day there is left at every dwelling-house a schedule for the purpose of being filled up by the householder with particulars as to the name, age, sex, profession or occupation, condition as to marriage, and birthplace of all living persons who abode in his house on the night of census day, and also whether any of these persons are blind, deaf mutes, or of unsound mind. In Wales and the County of Monmouth it is requisite to state whether persons speak Welsh only, or both Welsh and English.

In the case of jails, hospitals, asylums, and public and charitable institutions, the governor or master is responsible for furnishing all particulars he can with respect to the inmates, and as regards persons travelling or on shipboard, and the houseless poor, the Local Government Board obtain particulars by such means as appear to them best adapted for the purpose. The population of a place as returned by the census is its actual and not

its resident population — therefore, all persons found in a place on census night, be they strangers or natives, in houses, on ships or shelterless, are treated as units in its population, the only exceptions to this method of counting being persons travelling by rail or other vehicles, and who cannot be enumerated as abiding in any particular place on census night. Such persons on arrival at their destination in the morning are counted as part of the population of the place to which they then came. It is obvious that the alteration in favour of a single fixed night greatly removes the chances of omission and double entry. On the day following the census date the householders' schedules are collected by the enumerators, who copy them into books, adding an account which they have taken from the best information available of all persons living within their divisions who have not been included in the schedules. It is probable that the number of these persons, consisting mainly of the vagrant class, is understated owing to the difficulty experienced in their enumeration. The books are subsequently verified and made as accurate as possible by the registrars, and transmitted with the schedules to the Registrar-General for tabulation, and with the presentation to Parliament of preliminary and detailed abstracts, the work of the census is finished, a year or two usually elapsing before the final abstract is completed.

In Scotland the Secretary of State superintends the census, the Registrar-General for that country acting as in England. The procedure is practically the same, save that the sheriffs of counties, and the chief magistrates of Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dundee, Aberdeen, Greenock, Paisley, Leith, and Perth, exercise the functions of superintendent registrars. The particulars furnished include information as to whether persons speak Gaelic only, or both Gaelic and English.

The business of the Irish census is performed under the control of the Lord Lieutenant and his Chief Secretary. The enumerators are officers and men of the Dublin Police Force and Royal Irish Constabulary, who, on the day after the census date, and one or more next consecutive days, fixed by the Lord Lieutenant, severally visit, between the hours of half-past eight in the morning and six in the afternoon, every house within such districts as are allotted to them, and take an account in writing of the number of persons

who abode there on the night of the census, with the usual particulars concerning them, and of their religious belief. The 1891 census will be the fourth decennial one embracing an enquiry into the religious profession of the Irish people. The Acts regulating the 1861 and 1871 censuses, made compulsory under penalty a statement as to religion; but by subsequent Acts the statement is optional, and in 1881 five hundred and thirty persons seem to have availed themselves of the provision, and refused information. The accounts thus taken are delivered by the enumerators to certain of their superior officers, nominated by the Lord Lieutenant, who, after examining them and rectifying defects, transmit them to the General Register Office, where they are digested under the direction of the Chief Secretary.

As an indication of the effect on the population of emigration and immigration, it may be noted that in the decade covered by the last census, the English and Welsh emigrants exceeded the immigrants by upwards of one hundred and sixty thousand. In Scotland the excess of emigrants was estimated at over ninety-three thousand, while the Irish population was diminished by no fewer than six hundred and eighteen thousand persons, who were calculated to have permanently left the sister isle during the period in question. Current returns show a falling off in the number of emigrants from all parts of the kingdom.

The work of compiling the census is greatly increased by the multiplicity of territorial areas into which the country is divided, all of which have to be taken into account; and the labour is augmented by the difficulty of tracing the boundaries of the sub-divisions, which intersect and overlap each other in a manner bewildering even to local knowledge. Civil and ecclesiastical parishes, municipal and parliamentary boroughs, urban and rural sanitary districts, poor-law, registration, police, and judicial divisions, may be cited as examples of the areas which have to be dealt with.

A noticeable feature in the census returns is the number of curious names of occupations, which in most cases give no clue to the nature of the business. Take for instance, "budget-trimmer," which has no political significance; "bull-dog-burner" — unknown, we hope, in canine circles — and such occupations as piano-puncher, dog-minder, sand-badger, bear-breaker, doctor-maker, keel-bulley, blabber and coney-cutter, with hundreds of others

equally quaint, and inexplicable to most people. No doubt many of them were originally nicknames, but have passed into current use, and their appearance in the census schedules renders it necessary to take them into account. To assist the census tabulators in classifying such occupations, a dictionary has been prepared, mainly from information furnished by leading manufacturers as to the technical and local terms used in the various industries; and this dictionary contains between eleven and twelve thousand occupations, each having a name.

The female age returns of the census cannot be regarded as more than approximate. The extent of the falsification of ages of girls and women cannot, of course, be stated; but the tables for the age period twenty to twenty-five are probably the least to be depended upon. It is invariably found on examining the tables of successive censuses, that the young women aged from twenty to twenty-five are considerably more numerous than the girls aged ten to fifteen ten years earlier, of whom they are presumably the surviving remainder! It has been observed, too, that there is a tendency to exaggeration on the part of old persons uncertain of their age; and of the one hundred and forty-one persons who claimed centenarian honours at the last census, it is doubtful whether many of them had completed the hundredth year of life.

It may reasonably be assumed that each successive census is more accurate than its predecessor by reason of increased experience among local officials, and improved methods of enumeration. The growth of education has done much to facilitate the correct filling-up of householders' schedules, while the prejudice which existed against, and to some extent hampered, the earlier censuses, has now practically disappeared. Indeed, on the completion of the last census, official recognition was made of the goodwill and intelligence with which the people generally lent their co-operation in the work.

"THE LAIRD O' COCKPEN."

By "RITA."

Author of "Dame Durden," "Gretchen," "Darby and Joan," "Sheba," etc., etc.

CHAPTER V. "KILLED—OR CURED?"

THE little parlour looked dusky and cold in the dying twilight. Evidently Jean had thought that I was not coming downstairs

again that evening. She had lit the candles on the mantelpiece, and their dim light fell on the dark figure standing there—and gazing intently into the dull and flickering flame.

At the sound of my step he turned and looked at me. I saw his face was very white. All the gay youth of it was saddened and changed. His eyes had a sleepless, haggard look as of suffering endured until repression avenges itself.

"You—you wished to see me," I said, pausing a few yards off from where he stood. I did not offer to shake hands; what use to be conventional or formal, now? Did I not know full well what he had come to say? Did I not know equally well what my answer would be?

"Yes," he said, and he moved a step or two nearer. "But won't you shake hands? Are you still unforgiving?"

I extended my hand mechanically, and then seated myself in the chair he drew forward.

"I—I hope you believe me when I say how sorry I have felt for you in all this time of trouble," he said, with hesitation. "Words don't count for much—and—somehow I could not write. I thought perhaps you would see me if I called. It is very good of you."

"It is not good at all," I said, brusquely. "I knew it would have to happen sooner or later."

"You say that as if you wished to—to get it over, like an unpleasant duty. Are you still angry with me, Athole?"

The reproach in voice and look irritated me.

"Why should I be—angry?" I said. "I only wish to hear why you wanted to see me—why you are here?"

"I will soon tell you that," he said, very quietly. "You—you are of course aware that my father's death has made me a comparatively rich man. There is no necessity now for me to lead a wandering life, or be anything but a respectable citizen. I think, however, I owe it to myself and to you, Athole—to be perfectly frank. I—I spoil your life in the past; let me atone for it in the future. We are still young. Freedom has come to you, prosperity to me. Let us forget all this dark and miserable time, and be happy as—once we dreamt we should be happy. I know it is very soon to speak; but there are circumstances which make conventionality seem a very poor thing. I want you to forgive me, Athole

—to take me back. You can't have forgotten; you can't have changed. Good Heavens! why do you look at me like that?" "I may not have forgotten," I said, coldly; "but I have—changed."

He drew back a step. He looked at me with flaming eyes—angry, incredulous. "I don't believe it," he said, passionately. "You are trying to deceive yourself, and me; you think you owe it to your husband's memory to appear shocked at—at my speaking so soon. Do you think I cannot read you better; that I did not study every detail of your life; that I could not see how dreary it was—how miserable?"

The grain of truth in his words stung me to the quick. I felt the blood leap in angry tide to my face.

"Was it for that reason you came on the yacht at my husband's request?" I cried, stormily. "To spy out my life and my surroundings while accepting a hospitality you now abuse? It is on a par with most of your actions."

He grew very white.

"Athole, you know me better than that," he said.

"I only know that but for you my life would have been safe and happy, sheltered by a good man's love and devotion. I only know that I pained and saddened his life every hour I shared it by my blind and wilful selfishness. I only know that for my sake he went to his death. I only know that always, always his voice is ringing in my ears out of that cruel sea. I only know that of all the mistakes in my miserable, mistaken life, I regret none so much as the mistake I made in loving you—or—or thinking I loved you—and so wilfully blinding myself to a worthier and a better love."

"That is enough," he said, as he drew back, and stood looking at me with white face and burning eyes. My voice had suddenly broken, a choking sob cut short the torrent of passionate words. "Did I not say when first I knew you," he went on, "when we took that very first walk, that a woman's promises were like clouds—drifting, not stationary? She only thinks she loves, and when a man believes her he finds it is some passing fancy she has dignified by that name. If—if you had really cared, you would not have changed, you could not!"

His voice was low and fierce; his eyes burned darkly in the whiteness of his face. I sat there, my hands clasped, the great

tears falling on my black dress. But neither his passion nor his wrath moved me. My heart seemed dead to any appeal or any plea of his.

Suddenly he threw himself down before me, clasping my hands, and raining kisses on them between his broken words.

"Oh, Athole, Athole, listen! It can't be true, that you have ceased to care—that you have forgotten all that used to be. It is not so very long ago, and Heaven knows if I wronged you that I have suffered enough for it. What has changed you? This cold, hard woman is not my little, gentle love of long ago—who was so pitiful and so kind—and so forgiving."

I looked at him kneeling there, humbled, pleading, despairing. Once it would have been my sweetest revenge. But now I only felt a great sorrow and a great pity; yet neither stirred one pulse of the old love, or broke down that cold, strange barrier which death and remorse had raised between us.

"Douglas," I said, more gently than I had yet spoken, "I cannot even to myself explain what has changed me; but I am changed utterly and entirely. Once love seemed to me everything, and I gave myself up to it without a thought or regret. Oh how I loved you then, Douglas! I had no thought or wish or desire that was not of you or with you; there was nothing you might have asked that I would not have done. Think how you repaid me. One cannot go back—one cannot live twice through such a time as that. The first repayment of my love for you was faithlessness; the second—insult. Then it seemed to me that I had only been worshipping a false idol—that even if I could believe and care in the old blind, trusting way, I should only wake to fresh disappointment and fresh sorrow. I wanted a love great and strong and unselfish, to lift me to higher things, not let me fall to lower. You taught me distrust, then sorrow, then shame. Is it such a wonderful thing that I should have changed; that I should look out on life with eyes of suspicion and of fear? You blame me very harshly. Cannot you understand that this change was not brought about by any wish or will of mine? I—I cannot even to myself explain it. But it is here—like lead or ice about my heart—I feel as if nothing could ever soften or subdue me again."

There were no tears in my eyes now. But I felt the hot scorch of his as they fell on my clasped hands.

"I think," he said, at last, "that you wrong yourself. This is only a feeling born of grief, and regret, and trouble. Your nature is not cold, and your heart is not hard. You were right to blame me for—for my madness—for what you justly call an insult; but surely you might understand a man's feelings are not always under his control; and I had suffered horribly all that time on the yacht, when I kept aloof from you, and schooled myself every day to treat you as if—as if you were no more to me than the others. I know I should not speak like this now; it must seem presumptuous and ill-judged; but in a way I am forced to it. Penryth is going back to Australia at once, and he wishes me to go with him. I could not make any plans or leave this country without saying what was in my heart, without asking for some hope, however small. And I would be patient enough now, Athole."

I drew my hands coldly away.

"I have no hope to give you, Douglas. I do not say it from any pretence of propriety, or prudery; you, I think, know me better than that. It is the simple truth. I—I do not love you any longer."

The truth was out at last; the strange, inexplicable truth which had haunted me for so long now, defying me to contradict it, or its accusation of faithlessness on my part. He listened, then dropped my hands and rose slowly to his feet.

"I am to understand," he said, coldly, "that all is at an end, that you never wish to see me, that I am to consider myself dismissed—for ever?"

"You put it very harshly," I said; "but I suppose that is what it amounts to."

"You are not saying this out of any foolish revenge, any jealousy of that old folly about another woman?"

"If you mean Mrs. Dunleith, you forget that I know her real character. It was in your journal. I have neither jealousy nor fear of her, nor any desire to be revenged for what she once made me suffer."

"Then this change is—real, or—am I to suppose I am supplanted? There is Kenneth."

"Do not insult me," I said, coldly; "I have given you an explanation, a perfectly true one. You are at liberty to believe it or not. Be very sure of this, that widowhood is to me a sorrowful reality, and its sorrow is all the greater because of

the regret and remorse that must for ever embitter its memory. Have I said enough?"

"Quite enough," he said, his voice cold and hard, his eyes alone betraying the wounded pride and fierce anger he sought to control. "Your sentiments are a credit to your position; I wonder which will last the longest?"

I rose abruptly.

"We need not discuss that point. I did not expect you would understand: It must seem strange; but I have only spoken the truth of my feelings."

"I know you were always particularly candid."

"If I said I was sorry, you would not believe me, and I cannot be hypocritical and offer you friendship, or—or talk of a future when we shall meet, and can afford to laugh at all this as a long-dead folly. I almost hope, Douglas, that we never shall meet again on this side of eternity."

"Will nothing move you?" he cried, barring my way to the door, as I turned in that direction. "Have you considered what this means for both of us? If you send me from you now, I swear I will never come back; never ask what I have asked to-day; never give you the satisfaction of knowing you can make a man suffer to gratify what I believe is, after all, your own wounded vanity, or your desire to revenge on me the pain you say I once caused you."

"It is only natural," I said, "that you should misjudge me. But you may believe I am speaking the simple truth; I am not acting out of revenge; it would be a base and foolish thing to do; and much as I have suffered at your hands, Douglas, I would not, if I could, deal you back one pang, one tear, one regret, of all the many you cost me. Once I might have wished you to suffer; but not now."

"Then it is only that you have ceased to love me?"

"That," I said, "is the simple truth. I cannot explain it, but I feel it. No doubt it sounds strange. I think it must; but it is the truth, and it is best you should know it."

"I—I suppose," he said, turning away, "I am rightly served. All my life I have been heedless, selfish, inconstant, taking what pleasure came in my way, careless of suffering caused to others. Still, it is very hard—"

"I am very sorry," I said, more gently;

"but I think all feeling and sentiment of that sort died out of me when—when I woke from that terrible time of fever and learnt my loss, and seemed to recognise my long selfishness and blindness. When once one recognises a change like that, there is no possible resurrection. One seems to drift apart in the spirit as in the flesh. The word 'together' has lost all its magic."

"You analyse your feelings as mercilessly as a vivisectionist would a victim," he said, bitterly; "I am glad to leave you in so comfortable a frame of mind. Life will soon resume interest for you. It is only the heart whose love has outlived hope that knows what real loneliness is."

The dull fire had died out, the little parlour looked cheerless and gloomy. I shivered as with sudden cold. His words echoed mournfully in my ears—I whose life was so lonely and so empty now.

But it had to be. I could not recall the past, could not pretend to live in its memories, and be glad as once I had been glad.

I stretched out my hands to him.

"Forgive me, Douglas—and say good-bye. Believe me, it is better you should know the truth even if—it pains you, than wake to disillusion and regret."

He took my hands in both his own. The anger died out of his face, leaving it very sad and very white.

"Perhaps," he said, "you hardly know how cruel you are; but why should I blame you? Another woman would not have spoken so truthfully. You must be very sure of yourself to have done so; for, as truly as there is a heaven above us, Athole, I will never—after to-night—look upon your face or seek your side again. You hear me?"

"Yes," I said, quietly. "I hear you."

"And you have nothing more to say?"

Calmly and steadily I looked up in his face.

"No, Douglas—I have nothing more to say."

"Heaven forgive you, Athole—and—Good-bye."

CHAPTER VI. A HAVEN OF REST.

THE day after I had parted from Douglas, Huel Penryth came to say good-bye to me.

I think he must have guessed something of what had passed between us; but he said very little, only when he rose to take his

leave, and was holding my hand, he looked somewhat wistfully at me.

"You would like to ask me a question, I know," I said. "Do not be afraid. You will not hurt or offend me."

"You are quite sure?" he asked, eagerly. "It is not for my own sake, and Douglas is really in great distress. He was raving like a madman last night. I could hardly believe what he said. Is this parting irrevocable?"

"Yes," I answered, simply.

"There is no hope, no chance that the past might be forgotten? You are both very young, and you—how little happiness you seem to have had! Are you acting rightly? Are you quite sure of your motives?"

"I am quite sure. I cannot explain why I have changed; but I only know that it is a fact. I have made one mistake in marriage. I will not—knowingly—make another. It seems as if years divided me from that time when I loved with a girl's unquestioning trust. I could not go back—I could not. If I—in time—had any thought of—of what he wishes, I should never be content, nor content him. One cannot live through such feelings twice in a lifetime."

"You are right," he said, gravely; "one cannot."

"I wish he would believe," I said, earnestly; "but he only thinks me heartless and—and fickle. My life seems to have all gone wrong, I think. I have always disappointed and pained every one who has cared for me."

"I have often wished to tell you," he said, gently, "that I am sure your husband understood you far better than you imagined—and at the last—"

"Oh hush, hush, I cannot bear to think of it. What right had I to be so blind—so selfish? And he will never know that I was so sorry, that I would, oh so gladly, give my own life now to save his, so brave, and good, and useful. That is the sting in it all"—I went on, unheeding the tears that came falling helplessly down my cheeks—"I may repent, cry, pray, grieve as I please; but he will never know. Oh, why are we not more careful, more loving, more considerate, living as we do always in the shadow of death, and not knowing from day to day what may happen? Oh, if we only were sure of meeting, sure of some time—any time, however distant, bringing us once more together—when we could explain, and understand, and be

forgiven! Life is cruel enough—but death——”

“Perhaps,” he said, gently, “death is less cruel than you imagine. It is for the living I always feel regret. They have to bear the loss, and suffer for the mistakes; to see the sun rise in hopelessness and set in despair. But I do not think you need reproach yourself so bitterly. Your husband had not one harsh or bitter thought of you. He blamed himself for selfishly binding your life to his, for taking advantage of your youth and inexperience. He did not easily express his feelings—those quiet, self-contained people never do—but I know they were very deep and earnest.”

“I am sure of that,” I said, sadly. “If only it were not too late. You can have no idea of how that time haunts me. The wild storm, the cruel sea—and he—facing it alone. I wake at night hearing the howl of the wind and dash of waves, and his face seems to rise from their midst and look at me so reproachfully.”

I shuddered involuntarily, and covered my eyes with my hands.

“It is no use to speak of this now,” I said, at last; “and to Douglas least of all. He knows that I was very unhappy at first; that I married without really caring very much for Donald Campbell. He cannot understand that I should change—that remorse and regret might have opened my eyes to his real worth.”

“No,” said Huel Penryth, in the same grave, gentle way. “He cannot understand—yet. But he will. Do not let that thought distress you. I know Douglas Hay; I read his character long ago. He will suffer sharply, cruelly for a time; but, afterwards, there will be consolation. His is not the nature to mourn and endure. The clouds are dark and stormy at first—but the sunshine behind is too strong for them; they are dashed aside, pierced, scattered, and forgotten. So he will forget. If I might speak to you candidly, frankly——”

“You may,” I said, looking steadily up at his face, and wondering how so much strength and calmness could be allied to a pity so evident—a gentleness that a woman might have envied.

“Then I will tell you that I have rather dreaded you might make what I felt would be another mistake. You would be less content even with Douglas Hay than—than you esteemed yourself with Donald Campbell. His is not the nature to mate

with yours, and his good looks, and fascinations, and brilliant qualities would soon pall upon you. These three years of your life have been an education of your nature and mind, and all that is highest and best in them. You could not endure a new disappointment—a new failure. You would accept love now with fear and questioning—not with simple faith and the halo of idealisation. So it is far, far better that you reject it altogether than run the risk of a disillusion so cruel that your life would for ever suffer. You need never be wholly dependent on others. Your nature will widen and your sympathies enlarge. As time goes on you will learn to live for deeper, and greater, and more satisfying things than dreams, and passions, and sentiments. I can foresee for you all the possibilities of consolation. They lie within yourself, and suffering and loss have taught you the way to find them.”

The echo of those words is still ringing in my ears. I have put them down here, but I cannot reproduce the voice that lent them force and inspiration. And yet——

Well, let me be truthful, at least. It is to Huel Penryth I owe the secret of this change in myself. From the hour I met him, life no longer narrowed itself into petty grooves and beaten tracks. Something in his nature rang out a trumpet-call to me, and all things small, selfish, narrow-minded, fell before that bold and ringing challenge. I am a happier woman for knowing him. I cannot but acknowledge that—and yet even his friendship I may not keep. He, too, fades out of my life, and the veil of silence and separation falls between us from to-night.

Let my tears rain down unchallenged and unseen, save by this safe and silent confidant of so many follies and mistakes. I have time enough now to recall and think them over—time enough to see how fully I cheated myself into delusion—time enough to grieve, and repent, and pray.

My soul cries out in passionate longing to the dead I have loved and wronged. To the living one can always atone, but to those dear ones, in the silence, what can one say? What can they hear or know of the remorse they leave behind?

Answer that, oh, wise men, preachers of eternal mysteries, expounders of great truths. Answer it in such wise that our breaking hearts may know peace, and

feel sure that what you say is true and worthy of belief.

I sit here alone in the hush and silence of midnight; and as I lift my head I see, facing me in the mingled light and shadows of the room, another face. The eyes look back at me, large, and deep, and strangely sorrowful.

With a start I seem to know them as my own.

"We are looking at each other, you and I," they seem to say, "as we have looked so often, in childhood, maidenhood, womanhood, in love, and sorrow, and despair. But the soul behind shall look out one day with no tears to blind, and no despair to darken; for only through suffering can it win peace, and by grief and pain alone is its redemption bought."

The days come and go. It is nearly two weeks since they laid Grannie in her grave. How long ago it seems—how cruelly, hopelessly long! Some strange spirit of unrest is in me to-day. I cannot remain here. I am weary of the confinement of the house, its loneliness, and silence. I will dress and go out, away to that hillside where she lies at rest—away to that quiet home of the dead I have so often envied, set in the solemn peace of that fairy hill.

The afternoon is cold but bright. I can easily walk there and back before the dusk falls. I will tell old Jean, in case any of the Camerons call here. Bella is expected daily. She might arrive, and they would be sure to come round for me.

How can I write it? How can I say it? Where am I to find words coherent and expressive of joy? It seems almost a wrong to put it down—and yet I must—I must. So much of my life is here. Shall not the silent friend of these past years chronicle also this glad, and amazing, and still almost incredible surprise!

I walked along the winding road that curved itself in gradual ascent to the crest of the hill. I knew where Grannie's grave was, and I passed under the now leafless trees, and among the still and low-lying dead until I reached the spot.

Neither stone nor cross yet marked that resting-place, only dark earth and a few flowers, withered and dead from the frosts of those past chill nights. It was very quiet there. No solitary figure was anywhere in sight. No sound save the flutter

of some passing bird disturbed the air, and beyond, in the western sky, was the red, wintry sun, burning over dark hills and faint patches of unmelted snow.

I stood there gazing down, a thousand strange chaotic thoughts whirling through my brain. But always—always that same wonder. Did she know?—could she see me? Was that silence as deep, and that barrier as impassable on her side as on ours, who still lived, and loved, and mourned?

Had she and Donald met, and could she tell him how I sorrowed for his loss? Would he be glad to know I had not forgotten, and had not ceased to grieve? Would he—

I think it was at this point my thoughts broke off. A step approaching on the hard, firm road disturbed them. It came nearer, nearer, nearer—so close that out of wonder I turned.

For one moment I thought I must be mad or dreaming. A ghastly terror seized me, and all of earth seemed but one heaving tumult under my quivering limbs.

Could the sea give up its dead, or was this Donald that I saw—pale, worn, wasted, the shadow of the stalwart Highland chieftain I had known, but looking at me with Donald's honest eyes, holding out Donald's big, eager arms in diffident and yet most eager welcome?

"Athole—my lassie—my dear wife!"

Donald's voice! Oh, merciful Heaven! No dream—no fancy this! With a cry, eager, wondering, incredulous, but glad, as surely never word or cry of mine had sounded to his ears before, I flew to those outstretched arms, clinging to him, weeping, laughing, with a gladness almost fearful, so wondering, so incredulous it still knew itself to be.

But it was true—quite true; Donald was alive, safe, well; holding me to his heart, soothing my tearful, hysterical sobbing, murmuring every fond and tender word that love could speak out of its new-born gladness.

And in that gladness truth spoke out at last. I told him all—everything—of that lurking shadow which so long had been between us; of my folly and its bitter lesson, and all my suffering and self-reproach; and I heard in honest, broken words, whose rough eloquence was sweet to me now beyond all honeyed phrases of romance, how deep and true was his love

for me—how long and how patiently he had suffered and kept silence.

I did not learn the story of his escape then. That followed long afterwards; but here by Grannie's grave—here on that lonely hill which seemed destined to be the stage of so many dramatic episodes in my life, we poured out our hearts in plain and sober truth at last, and hand in hand beside her narrow resting-place, we "kissed again with tears."

L'ENVOI.

AND now to satisfy enquiries as to how the Laird escaped, and, having escaped, how so long a time elapsed before I heard of it.

The boat was caught in a squall and carried out to sea long before they could help themselves. Here they found that they were in the teeth of a furious gale, and for hours battled with deadly peril. Towards dawn, the boy Davie, exhausted and spent, was washed overboard. In making an effort to save him, Donald lost steering way of the boat, and a huge wave capsized it. How he struggled and managed to scramble on the keel and keep himself afloat he could never explain; but, nevertheless, in the grey dawn he was found in that perilous situation, and picked up by a Dutch schooner, in the very last stage of exhaustion. The long exposure, and the blow he had received when dashed against the side of the vessel, brought on concussion of the brain, and for months he was never wholly conscious, nor could he in any way recollect or explain who he was to the kindly folk who had saved him and taken him on their own voyage out of sheer inability to comprehend his language, or guess his position. When at last he drifted back to sense and memory, he was appalled at the length of time that had elapsed since he had been swept out to sea.

He was in a strange country, and he had no money. His only valuables were his watch and chain, and a ring with the seal and crest of his clan. With these he raised enough money to bring him back to England. Then he wrote to me at Corrie-moor, telling me of his escape, and that he was on his way home. Following the letter with all speed, he stayed at Inverness to ask news at Craig Bank. Here he nearly scared old Jean out of her wits,

and learned that we had all believed him dead, and that I was no longer at Corrie-moor. He left Craig Bank, and followed me to the cemetery, resolved that I should not remain an hour longer in ignorance of his fate.

The rest I have explained. And yet, it is not quite easy to explain how deep and strange a thing was this new joy of mine; with what fear and trembling I accepted it, knowing to the full my own unworthiness. How strange it seemed to look up at that kind, honest face, and read in its pallor and lines of suffering the story of the past months; yet to read behind and above all those signs a radiance, and content, and deep-felt thankfulness that I had never seen before! How strange to hear murmured again and again, as if the words had acquired a new meaning, "My wife, my wife!" How strange to see tears in those keen blue eyes, that I used to think were cold as the sky of his own land! How more than strange the change in myself, that swept away all restraint, and coldness, and diffidence, and for once—oh, thank Heaven for it!—let me show him all my heart, and ask for pardon and forbearance, and trust in that future which at last held brighter and more certain hopes for both.

And now what need to say more?

The few blank pages of my journal still face me; but I have no wish or will to write of what "may be." I am content with what "is."

If tears are in my eyes to-night, they are not altogether sad; only I wish—I wish Grannie was here to rejoice in my joy, and be sure of my exceeding thankfulness. And so, with trembling hand, I write these last lines. Surely the mistakes of the past will be my guide for the future—a warning to avoid the pitfalls and the snares that still lie scattered on the path of life; that path on which the feet of womanhood are now set, supported by the full, deep strength of a true and honest love.

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PRICE]

1891.

[SIXPENCE.

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"LOVEDAY."

By "RITA."

Author of "Dame Durdan," "Darby and Joan," "Gretchen,"
"The Laird o' Cockpen," etc.

CHAPTER I. MORNING.

LOVEDAY sat on a ridge of the swelling sand-hills, watching the blue sea glistening in the sun, and the sweeping flight of the sea-gulls as they passed to and fro in their restless search for prey.

The sands, on which the little lazy waves were breaking, were white and firm, and strewn with lovely shells of strange tints and shapes. On either side of the curving coast were little bays and coves, and to the right of the hills where that little quiet figure sat so still, and so watchful in its self-sought solitude, towered a great and massive pile, called by the Cornish fisher folk the Gull Rock.

In the autumn and winter the coast was full of danger, and no place was more dangerous than this rock—for its base ran for a long distance under the smiling, treacherous sea, and even at low tide it was seldom uncovered.

How well Loveday knew it! Her baby eyes had rested on it as soon as they had rested on anything, with that early observance and wonder which her nurse called "taking notice." When she learnt to walk and was trusted to run alone on the firm, white sands, she seemed to have always set that rock before her as a sort of

goal, and to have toddled off in its direction with a reckless speed that soon brought her pert little nose into ignominious contact with mother earth.

Then when the little legs grew stronger, and the steps more certain, and she could walk as far and as quickly as her old sailor foster-father, or even his stalwart son, Dick, she still resolutely made for that same landmark—though as yet she had never quite reached it. Either the tide would not serve, or it took too long a time to get there and back, or it was reckoned too dangerous a place for a little girl, or—well, there seemed no end to the number of excuses and difficulties—but the truth was that Loveday had never yet got to the Gull Rock, and that gradually it had become invested with a sort of superstitious fear and reverence in her childish mind.

To-day as she sat on the sand-hill, hugging her knees in a somewhat ungraceful fashion, and letting those great blue eyes of hers rove from sea to sky, and sky to cove, from the white clouds to the white wings of the restless birds, she took in also that great, dark, frowning pile, and found herself wondering how it had ever come there, and how old it was; what strange scenes and sights it must have seen; what tales of storms and shipwrecks it could tell if it could speak; and she wondered, too, if that evil and tricky spirit, Tregeagle, had ever really lived there, as the Cornish folk about her declared.

She had been fostered on legends and stories more or less weird and mysterious

ever since she could remember. Her foster-father, Richard Penywern, had a perfect store of them—and so had many of the old fisher folk in the little village—and as Loveday was a general favourite everywhere, and never so happy as when listening to stories of some sort, it was only natural that she should have learned and heard a good deal even in these ten years of her childhood.

She was a very happy little child, was Loveday, with a nature as bright and contented as her own little happy face, and a smile and a pleasant word for every one she met. She knew where the earliest primroses were hiding, and where the lovely little violets opened their dark-blue eyes, so like her own; and what songs the water-fairies sang under the little, cool, babbling streams; and where the glossy hart's-tongue uncurled itself in the shade of the green hedges; and where the thrushes built their nests, and the merry, chattering magpies met to gossip and talk over affairs of the bird kingdom—for all the world like a parcel of gossiping villagers on a market day. Yes, all these things Loveday knew, and delighted in, and it seemed to her that human life was bounded only by this Cornish village, and the blue sweeping sea beyond, and that nothing more beautiful or desirable could exist even in that vague "world" of which her books spoke, and of which the old sailor would tell in those long, winter evenings when the coast-guardmen gathered round his fire, and she sat on Dick's knee in the chimney-corner, listening and wondering with all her childish soul.

But to-day Loveday thought or cared for no world beyond that on which she gazed. It was May-day, and she was ten years old; and every one who knew her in the village and at the little station high up there on the cliffs, had brought her some offering or keepsake in token of that event. For Loveday was a general favourite, in spite of the mystery about her, and her old foster-father's reticence on the point. She never remembered any other name but this, any other parents but the kindly old sailor and the sweet, sad-faced woman, his wife, who had died when she was four years old.

If she asked any questions of Dick, he only laughed, and said they would take care of her always; she need not fear. And her own happy disposition lent itself readily to content, and to accept without further question.

"Some day I'll tell you your history, Miss Loveday," the old man had said once, when she had asked him of her parents; and that "some day" was a vague and remote period for which she waited in simple faith.

And now she was ten years old. Ten years! She looked at the great, grim rock, and thought how many tens and tens of years it must have known.

And her thoughts ran on, speculating and imagining a hundred things, as they had a trick of doing when she was alone, or in some of her favourite haunts; for with all the child's brightness, and mirth, and mischief, there was a vein of thoughtfulness and gravity, and almost sadness, in the depths of her nature—something too vague to speak of, but which she herself keenly recognised. It threw its shadow over her when she was lonely, or in some mood like that of to-day—a mood altogether out of keeping with the summer brightness of sea and sky, and the warmth and fragrance of the air. In these moods her childish senses seemed to shapen into distaste and fastidiousness; she thought Dick coarse, and the kindly old coast-guard rough, and her surroundings poor, and her dress ugly and common. Why, she could not tell. But these ideas would crowd in upon her.

Perhaps the summer visitors had something to do with it—ladies who came in carriages, with pretty children, some of her own age and size, who seemed to speak a different language, and belong to a different world to that which she knew. They would run about the station, and ask her questions about the tall flag-staff, and the Gull Rock, and the old, ivy-covered church in the valley below; but they always seemed to treat her as one of the sailors' children, and she knew herself that in instinct and taste she was every whit as much a lady as any of those dainty, doll-like, frilled and flounced young damsels who looked askance, and tossed their golden curls, and displayed their superiority in a score of ways.

Her little mind was very full of these things on this May-day, for the village was all astir with the news of some great folk who had taken the old, deserted house called St. Perran, just a mile beyond the village itself, but whose moss-grown turrets and quaint old gables she could see so well from the little station on its vantage ground of cliff.

No one had occupied it for years; but

now it was being cleaned, and repaired, and put in order, and as soon as it was ready these people were to come there.

Loveday found herself wondering what they would be like, and how many children there would be to run about those great, wild, delicious gardens which she knew so well, for the gardener's wife lived at the lodge, and was very fond of her, and had often taken her over the grounds, and part of the house, too. Of course, now she would not be able to go there any more.

She gave a little sigh as she thought of it, and the sigh was echoed by a sharp, sudden yelp, so close to her that she started, and sprang to her feet with a little terrified cry.

There was nothing very alarming, only a small white dog of a kind she had never seen, with thick, silky coat, and a white ruff of hair standing round its neck, and a collar with little silver bells, that rang and tinkled with its every movement.

It stood close beside her on the ridge of the sand-hill, looking at her with bright, dark eyes, and a defiant, yet somewhat uncertain, expression. Loveday, who loved all dumb animals as she loved the birds and flowers, and the blue sea, and the dancing waves, and had no sort of fear of anything, immediately held out her hand and made friendly overtures to the stranger. At first he received them with doubt, as befitted a canine gentleman brought up in select and aristocratic circles. Gradually, however, he seemed to make up his mind that she was not dangerous or aggressive, and came a little nearer, and actually permitted the little brown hands to caress his silky coat, and to pat his graceful head, and listened, with pleased self-consciousness, to her admiring words.

"I wonder to whom you belong, you pretty fellow," said Loveday, admiringly.

She had never seen such a beautiful dog, and she was sure no one in the village owned him. She looked at his collar, and saw a name engraved on it, which, after much difficulty, she made out to be "Ruff." He answered readily to the name, and ran about and capered round her with great glee and good humour. Still no owner appeared in search of him, and Loveday wondered what to do.

Finally, she thought she would go to the village with him, and ask there if any visitors or strangers had arrived, to whom the dog might belong. He followed her

readily enough, and even permitted her to carry him when the way was very rough and stony.

When she reached the village she found the whole place keeping "May-day" in the Cornish fashion. A long procession of young men and girls carrying wreaths and garlands were dancing in and out of the houses, singing and laughing in most uproarious style. The long procession looked very odd as it wound in and out of all the houses and shops. Every door stood open, and no one gainsayed the intrusion. Loveday stood a little aside, clasping the dog in her arms and looking at the strange scene with her big violet eyes.

Suddenly, a voice spoke to her in imperious, domineering fashion. "Hullo! little girl," it said, "what are you doing with my dog?"

Ruff, hearing it, whined and struggled in her arms, and finally wriggled out and threw himself in ecstasy upon the speaker. He was a boy of some fourteen years, dark, handsome, tall; and the little girl looked at him with surprise and admiration, as a new order of being, and one wholly different to the specimens of boyhood with whom she was acquainted.

"Is he your dog?" she said, not shyly, but with the coolness and ease which were part of her natural fearlessness. "I found him a long way off, by the sea. I brought him here to ask if any one in the village knew where he had come from. I'm very glad you have found him."

"So am I," he said, patting the little dog's head and bidding him be quiet. "I don't know how he got away. I suppose he doesn't know his way about very well yet. We only came here yesterday."

"Oh," said Loveday, looking critically at him, and wondering who he was, and why he wore such grand clothes and had a watch and chain, for all the world like a grown-up man.

"Yes," continued the boy, glancing in the direction of the laughing, dancing crowd, "we've come to that big house down there—St. Perran. At least, I've come, and my sisters and their governess. My parents don't appear till we're all straight."

"Oh!" said Loveday again, feeling as if she were hearing a new language.

But she liked the frank, handsome, boyish face, and even the somewhat haughty manner charmed her, as the superiority of some young Prince might

have done. How grand he was, and how handsome! She had never seen any one in the least like him.

"What are all these people doing?" he asked, presently.

She explained the custom, and told him that every house door must stand open on this May-day, and no one could refuse admission to these merry-makers; that they would dance and feast till evening.

"It's very rum," he said, in his school-boy phraseology.

And Loveday, who only knew that word as expressing a liquor made into grog for the old coastguardsmen in the winter evenings, said:

"Do you think so?" and wondered, in her childish mind, what "rum" had to do with the procession.

"Which is the nearest way to the sea?" the boy asked, presently. "Do you mind showing me?"

The little girl acquiesced at once, and led the way back to the sand-hills, with Ruff dancing and curvetting about them both as if glad to see his master and his new friend on such excellent terms. They began to talk quite confidentially by-and-by. He told Loveday his name, which she thought as beautiful as that of a fairy Prince, though it was only Guy Ruthven, and related a whole family history, which she cared very little about. It appeared, though, that the old house, St. Perran, had been left to the boy's father by some recently-deceased relative, and that they were all coming to live there for a time, at all events, if the place agreed with his mother, who, from his account, was very delicate.

"And where do you live?" he asked Loveday, in his patronising, boyish way, when he had talked about his own affairs in a manner calculated to impress her with his importance.

She pointed in the direction of the coastguard's station.

"Over there," she said, briefly.

"Oh, how jolly!" cried the boy. "I do love a coastguard's place; may I come there? Will they let me see through their telescopes, and climb the flag-staff?"

"I don't know," said Loveday, doubtfully. "They never let me."

"Oh, but you're a girl; that's quite different. Here, let's run over there now; it doesn't look far. What's your governor—father, I mean? One of the men?"

"No," said Loveday, "not my real father. Only I've lived here always, and I call him dad."

"Then you're not a coastguardsman's child?" said the boy, rather disappointedly.

She shook her head. Her birth and mode of life had never troubled her; but she was sorry this young aristocrat was not pleased with them.

"Oh, I thought you were, and that you might help me, you know. But I suppose I shall manage; I can 'tip' them," he added, grandly.

"What's that?" asked Loveday, lifting her big blue eyes to his face with a puzzled look.

He laughed.

"What a funny little girl you are! Why, my sisters could beat you into fits, and they're not as old—at least, I don't know how old you are; but you look about ten, I fancy."

"I'm ten to-day; this is my birthday," said Loveday, proudly.

"Is it? Oh, if I had known I'd have given you a present. Stop a moment; perhaps I've got something in my pocket."

He thrust his hand into first one and then another of those convenient receptacles, bringing out various curious and, to all intents and purposes, useless articles, such as broken knives, cobbler's wax, pencil stumps, coloured crayons, india-rubber, toffee, some coppers, and, finally, a battered sixpence with a hole in it.

"Bother," he said, rather ruefully, "I really thought I had some tin; but I suppose I've spent it. Would you—would you take this for luck? It was awfully good of you to try and find Ruff's owner. See, it's got a hole in it, and if you put a bit of cord or ribbon through, and wear it round your neck, you'll always be lucky, and never want money—at least, that's what my old nurse said when she gave it me."

"Thank you," said the child, gravely, as she took the battered and defaced coin from his hand; "I'll wear it always."

He laughed.

"Oh, not when you're grown up, of course. You'll be having different keepsakes then; but just now in memory of me—and Ruff—you know."

"Yes," she said, again, in her simple, straightforward fashion.

She kept the coin in her hand, and they went on again, chatting and laughing with great friendliness until they reached the coastguard's station.

The old sailor, Loveday's foster-father, was standing by the flag-staff. As the

child ran eagerly towards him, she saw that he was not alone. Some one was standing there beside him. A stranger—tall, handsome, grave-looking—with eyes that were like her own, and a face strangely sad and stern; and yet it was so young a face, despite the lines about the eyes and mouth, and despite even the threads of grey in the fair hair, and the soft, drooping moustache.

The child stopped abruptly and looked at him, and he looked at her, sadly, yearningly, and yet as if not wholly glad to see her what she was.

Then suddenly he bent towards her, and she felt his lips, cold and trembling, on her soft, flushed cheeks.

"You do not know me," he said, hoarsely, and with effort. "But I have come to see you at last. I am your father—Loveday."

CHAPTER II. AFTERNOON.

It was very quiet and dreary in the old house, even on this bright May afternoon, and one room of it seemed absolutely deserted by the sunshine that fell across the newly-trimmed lawn, and the great, spreading cedar boughs, and through the slanting branches of the elm-trees on which the window looked.

It was a deep bay-window, with a wide, old-fashioned seat, and a woman sat there, gazing sadly and listlessly out at the tangled wilderness of shrubs and bushes which for long had known no tendance save that of Nature.

She was not young, though face and figure were youthful; but the lines of the one and the drooping weariness of the other spoke of a burden of sorrow and trouble which carried the weight of actual years.

Some faces betray nothing; others tell a story whose hidden pathos even an unobservant gaze may read.

This woman's face told some such story, now that it wore no mask and feared no observation—the story of passionate warfare, of a nature ever at war with itself, of sorrows deep and bitter, and pain suppressed, yet never quite evaded.

She sat there now as she so often sat when alone, gazing with unseeing eyes on the scene before her, wondering if ever again those eyes would take joy in the sunlight, or the dancing leaves, or the blue of sky or sea. From the shrubbery behind

came the sound of children's voices, sweet and careless as the spring song of the blackbirds, ringing out gay laughter of gayer youth; youth which to the quiet listener seemed so strange and far-off a thing.

The wistful look of her eyes deepened into pain; she turned away, and going over to the table littered with school-books and papers, she leant her head on her folded arms as if trying to shut out the sounds and sights beyond.

Now and then she sighed—the deep, broken sighs of a grief beyond tears to quench, or prayers to lighten. The grief the burden of which lay always—always, on that aching heart, unshared by any sympathy, uncared for by any living soul. Her thoughts had turned into old channels—and ran their dreary course unchecked.

"I brought my own misery on my own head. . . . But oh, Heaven! for a little peace—a little forgetfulness. Was my sin so great that its punishment must be so heavy? So many years have dragged themselves along, and yet . . . can I never hear a little child's laugh without this stab of pain, or see the spring-tide bloom afresh without that memory to rise and face me also, as keen and sharp in its torture as if but a thing of yesterday? Surely tears, grief, loneliness, might win me some mercy. But there seems none—none! Heaven and man alike are pitiless!"

Darker and darker the shadows gathered around that dark and dreary room. The flush and glow of sunset threw no ray of light within. The quiet figure still sat there—motionless, save for those deep, shuddering sighs that seemed the echo of more sorrowful thoughts.

For others life might be bright, joyous, welcome as a spring morning. To her it would be always—afternoon.

Loveday's little brain was full of perplexity and wonder.

Had he dropped from the clouds, this handsome stranger who had proclaimed himself her father? Why had he hidden himself all these years, and then only appeared to vanish again? True, he had said that he was coming back soon—very soon—and that then he would take her with him, and they would live in some beautiful far-off place which he pictured as a sort of fairy-land to her childish eyes, and then they should never be separated any more. But "soon" seemed a vague and far-away thing

to the child when she was once more left alone, and her old foster-father and his son seemed even more common and coarse in their ways after the sight, and speech, and gravely gentle ways of her newly discovered father.

She had been strangely shy with him. She had not ventured to ask why for so long he had not been to see her, or why she must still remain here instead of going away with him at once to that vague and beautiful world where he lived. No; none of these or a hundred other questions had she asked that now occurred to her. Yet for one whole day they had been together—a day she thought she would never forget. Her father had driven her for miles and miles into the beautiful green country, and they had stayed at some quaint little town the name of which she could not remember, and she had feasted on all sorts of dainties, and had come home laden with toys, and books of fairy tales, such as her childish soul delighted in; and as they had driven back in the sweet, spring evening, he had told her wonderful stories, and she had prattled to him of her innocent, happy life, and its trivial incidents and occupations. And then that night he had slept at the little white stone house which was her home; but when she woke in the morning, and dressed, and hurried to his room to ask for him, she found he had left.

He had gone—that wonderful stranger, than whom no fairy Prince could have seemed handsomer or more beneficent. Gone without even a good-bye!

For Loveday had slept soundly, and midnight had not betrayed any secret to her close-shut eyes, nor had her dreams been visited by any vision that silently and sadly stood beside her little white bed and gazed longingly down at the flushed, sweet cheeks, swept by long curled lashes, and the tumbled brown hair tossed so carelessly about the pillow. No, she knew nothing of these things; still less of the tears which had suddenly and strangely dimmed those stern, sad eyes; or that swift impulse which had bent proud knees and prouder heart in humbled prayer at her side. Nor could the angels, in whom she so firmly believed as watching round her bed, carry to her sleeping senses any echo of the passionate cry that sprang from heart to lips in that solemn midnight hour: "Heaven bless you, oh my little child—my little child, so deeply wronged!"

The lovely, sunny springtime drifted by. Loveday lived in it and enjoyed it as keenly as ever. Sometimes in her rambles she met Ruff and his young master, and they joined company and sought for primroses and ferns in the hedgerows; or ran races in the green fields, or sat quietly by some babbling rill reading fairy tales, or listening to each other's uneventful histories.

They had become great friends, these two: sharing sweetmeats, and books, and other interesting possessions in which youth delights with a magnanimity and good-will that spoke well for their feelings. Loveday had confided to Guy that eventful episode of her father's visit, and he had agreed with her that it was strange that he should not have taken her away, or fixed a definite time for his return. Together they speculated as to who or what he was, and the boy, out of some unsuspected chivalry not often peculiar to boyhood, forbore to throw any damper on her fanciful and somewhat extravagant theories as to the station, rank, and fortune of the wonderful stranger. Sometimes they wandered along the sands, or peered into the damp and slippery recesses of the many caves which had once been noted haunts of smugglers. Once, even, they had got as far as the Gull Rock; but the tide had thought fit to place an impassable barrier between that coveted eminence and its youthful would-be explorers, and they had reluctantly given up the idea.

"Is it ever covered by the sea?" asked the boy of his little companion, as they watched the waves curling and dashing at its base, and the gulls circling and whirling to and fro.

"Only in a great storm; or if there is a tide—equi—equi—something," said the child, with a confused memory of old Penywern's explanations. "I believe they have only seen it covered three times here. Mustn't it be beautiful up there?" she added, longingly; "right on the top, where the birds are sitting, and the waves can't reach you. How I should like to be there!"

"Not very easy, or a very nice place to get to," said the boy, throwing pebbles at the birds in an aimless, lazy fashion. "Well, it wouldn't be much good trying to-day, at all events, so we may as well go home. Why—" and he broke off suddenly, and looked somewhat annoyed. "Here are my sisters coming along, and their governess. Bother!"

"You don't seem pleased," said Loveday. "Aren't you fond of them?"

"Oh, they're well enough," was the gracious response. "Only I—— Well, I didn't want to meet them; that's all."

He couldn't very well say that the haughty and faultlessly-attired little maidens would probably have various cutting and sarcastic remarks ready by tea-time in compliment of his choice in the matter of acquaintances, or that he had refused to accompany them in their walk this very afternoon, because he "didn't want to be bothered with a pack of chattering girls." And now the trio were upon him, and he could but put the best face on the matter, and greet them with the brotherly ease and contempt he was far from feeling.

"Halloa! what brought you all here?" he said; while Loveday stood there beside him, gazing with unwonted curiosity at the pretty pink cotton frocks, so different to her own rough, sea-stained serge, and the smart sailor-hats, and the carefully-plaited tails, which put her own curling, tumbled locks to shame.

"Why shouldn't we walk on the sands as well as you?" said his eldest sister, glancing scornfully at the little fisher-girl, as she imagined her.

"Oh, of course," said the boy, reddening and fidgeting as he noticed the glance. "Well, I was just going back—so—so good-bye."

"We are going back also," said Maudie, the youngest girl, "aren't we, Mrs. Cassilis?" she added, appealing to the governess.

But Mrs. Cassilis was looking at Loveday, and did not seem to hear. Her face, delicate, and worn, and indescribably sad, was ashy white; her dark eyes had a strained and almost terrified look. Involuntarily her hand was pressed tight to her heart, as if to still some pain whose sudden sharpness hurt her.

Loveday noticed the pallor, and the action, though the other children had seen neither.

"Are you ill?" she asked, quickly; and the sweet, childish voice seemed to bring a sudden calmness and strength to the startled woman.

Her pupils turned to her at once, surprise and anxiety on the small, upturned faces.

"How white you are, Mrs. Cassilis! Is anything the matter?" asked the staid and stately Blanche.

With a great effort the trembling woman composed herself.

"No, my dear—nothing; only we have walked rather quickly, and I was tired," she answered. "We had better be going home now, I think."

The trio turned at once. Guy sauntered off at their heels with a would-be unconscious air, which yet had in it something of shame. Loveday stood looking at her and him in surprise.

The pale, sad-faced governess came nearer.

"Will you walk with me?" she asked. "I—I should like to talk to you."

Loveday's big bright eyes flashed wonderingly up at the speaker.

"Yes," she said, readily; "but why has Guy left? And why did his sisters look so strange?"

"Perhaps," said Mrs. Cassilis, "they were wondering who you were."

"They could have asked me then," said the child, curtly.

"They would not like to appear curious," said her new acquaintance, as they moved on side by side. "Will you tell me your name?" she added, gently, and with a certain hesitation that did not escape Loveday's quick observance.

"I'm only Loveday," she said, simply.

The delicate face grew a shade paler.

"Loveday—what a pretty name. Is it—Cornish?"

"I don't know," said the child. "No one ever told me."

"Have you no other name? Where are your parents?"

"I've always lived here," she answered.

"Up there," and she nodded in the direction of the cliff, where the cottages of the coast-guard stood in a white cluster. "I'm not Daddy Penywern's child, though," she added. "My real father is a grand gentleman, handsome, and tall, and rich. I've only seen him once; but he's coming here again soon, and will take me away altogether."

"But surely you know his name?" said her interlocutor.

The child shook her pretty, brown head, looking up at the pale, set face above her with eyes so strangely like to eyes that belonged to the past; eyes that had once looked with love and tenderness, and all a man's strong, passionate devotion, into those brown depths for ever shadowed now by the memory of sorrow and of wrong, self-wrought and repented of in vain.

The woman shivered, and her face grew even paler than before as that little negative shake silenced further enquiry.

"Tell me all about yourself," she said, holding out her hand.

She had taken off her gloves, and the touch of those small warm fingers clasping hers so frankly, sent a strange thrill of tenderness through her veins. Loveday chattered on in her childish, fearless fashion. Yet ever and again some trick of speech or manner, some turn of head, or glance from those deep, fringed eyes, woke fresh memories in the quiet listener's heart, or stabbed it with fresh pain and sharper torture.

Suddenly she knelt down on the firm, white sands, and drew the little childish figure to her heart.

"Kiss me, child," she cried, passionately. "Oh, don't look so frightened. I only ask it for the sake of—a little child like yourself, Loveday, whom I once held in my arms long ago. Dear Heaven, how long ago!"

A sob broke from her panting breast, and Loveday stood, half frightened, half pitiful, in the shelter of her arms, vaguely wondering at the tears that dimmed those beseeching eyes.

With that pity and that wonder lending fresh beauty to her own, she softly kissed the quivering lips which for so many weary years had known no touch of love, or caress of tenderness.

"Oh, don't cry," she said. "Was that little girl yours?"

But there was no answer as the kneeling figure rose and once more took its way along the quiet sands.

Loveday moved silently along beside the woman. Neither of them spoke.

CHAPTER III. NIGHT.

A KEEN sense of injury and injustice was vexing Loveday's little soul. Month after month had rolled by—springtide, summer, autumn—but no word or sign came to her of that mysterious father; nor did he seem in any haste to redeem his promise of return.

No one would have guessed how deeply the child suffered; how in every childish prayer that name lived and formed the groundwork of a petition, the simple faith of which was inexpressibly touching. But no answer came.

Almost every week—sometimes oftener—she saw that strange and sad-faced governess from St. Perran.

Guy had gone to a school, but the two younger girls had made friends with Loveday, and she had been invited to tea in the schoolroom several times. Miss Blanche was still lofty and aggressive in manner, as became her dignity and station; but Loveday was neither awed nor impressed by her airs.

She liked to go to the queer old house, to ramble through the garden and orchard, to play in the dim, ghostly-looking schoolroom, or sit in the wide old window-seat listening to Mrs. Cassilis' low, sweet voice as she read or told them fairy tales and legends in the twilight. It was strange how fond she had grown of that sad and quiet woman, though there was almost always something of awe in the affection, and an unusual reticence in its display from one of Loveday's bright and loving nature.

Now the heat and glory of summer were over, and the brown woods were growing bare which had been so thick with leaves, and gay with song. The little maiden sighed as day after day marked its change in the dying year, and something of its sadness and gloom began to fall upon herself, and lent wistfulness to the violet eyes which still each morning and each night looked longingly over cliff and headland to where the coach road stretched away into some vague region, from whence she hoped and looked for that mysterious stranger's return.

One afternoon the child wandered off to her favourite sands. The tide was out, and the firm, white expanse tempted her farther and farther, till at last she found herself opposite the Gull Rock. Wonderful to relate, the passage to it was easy and safe to-day. The long ridge, slippery with seaweed, and interspersed with little pools of sea-water, ran clear from the sands to the base of the great rough prominence. Without hesitation or thought, but with a little glad cry of surprise and delight, the child made her way along the treacherous pathway, and in a very few moments had reached that long-coveted haven, and commenced to climb its rough and dangerous height.

Midway up she started and gave a faint cry of surprise, for standing on a plateau of the rock that made a sort of platform, was a woman's figure. The face was turned seawards, but Loveday knew that slight form with its weary grace, and the simple black draperies that the wind fluttered to and fro. At her cry the

woman turned, echoing its wonder in her own hurried exclamation :

"Loveday ! you here—why, child, how—ever did you get to such a place ?"

And Loveday told of her long desire and ambition to scale the heights of the Gull Rock, and how she had heard the sailors say that when once the tide left it accessible it was safe for hours, and half coaxing, half persuading, she induced Mrs. Cassilis to climb higher and higher up the steep and rocky heights.

On they went, sometimes hand-in-hand, sometimes apart ; Loveday light and sure-footed, and springing from place to place with merry laughter and glee. But what was easy to her agile frame and fearless spirit was a different and more difficult matter to the weary woman encumbered with heavy garments, and already spent and tired with the long walk here. Loveday was far off, and within close distance of the goal she had set herself, when a sharp cry of pain startled her. She stopped and looked back, and saw Mrs. Cassilis lying prostrate on the rough stones some way below.

In a second she was beside the fallen woman, who, faint and scarcely conscious, vainly tried to rise or reassure the frightened child.

"It's my ankle," she said, faintly. "Oh, Loveday, I'm afraid it's broken ; I sprang on to that stone, and it turned with me, and then my foot seemed to give way."

She turned ghastly white to her very lips, and Loveday, terrified and helpless, stood there wondering what could be done.

"I shall never be able to walk," moaned the unfortunate woman ; "you must leave me here, dear, and go back for assistance."

"Go back !" Loveday looked at the helpless figure, and its desolate surroundings. Her little heart swelled with grief and sympathy, and the tears gathered in her eyes. "Oh, I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry ! If it hadn't been for me—"

"Nonsense, dear ! you're not to blame ; it was my own stupidity. But we mustn't waste time, child. Can I trust you to run back and ask some of the men at the coastguard station to come and help me !"

The child looked round at the desolate spot. The sun was setting already ; thick banks of clouds were gathering southwards ; the sea looked grey and angry, and the birds were whirling and screaming around the rock in an ominous fashion, as if they feared a coming storm.

But there was nothing to be done ; the child saw that, and braced her energies for the occasion.

"Can't I help you down to a better place ?" she entreated, as she looked at the damp and broken pile of rock on which the unfortunate woman lay.

"No, no, I can't move," she said, faintly. "Hasten now, dearie. There's no help for it ; I must stay here till you send assistance."

Then Loveday, moved by some sudden impulse, put her warm young arms round the suffering woman's neck and kissed her passionately and tenderly.

"I'll be as quick as ever I can," she said ; and so turned and climbed down the slippery, uneven ways, and crossed that dark, fin-like ridge, and, once on the sands, ran as her little feet had never run before, for never before had terror and anxiety lent them wings as now.

Those sad and patient eyes watched the little figure with a look that even the hopelessness of pain could not extinguish.

"She—might have been just as sweet, as loving, as lovely," she murmured, brokenly. "If it should be," she cried, aloud. "She is so like, so strangely, terribly like ! . . . But I shall never know now, the secret has been too well kept ; and yet—Oh, Derrick, I never thought you could be so hard, so cruel, just for sake of a few wild words—a threat I never meant, a fit of passion—brief, and soon repented of. . . . And all these weary, hopeless years to pay the penalty—and suspense, cruel as death itself, and that aching, aching void for ever in my heart ! And yet, for all my pride, and all my reproaches, I loved you so. . . . And now—Well, it is all over, all finished, Derrick ; and you will never know how sorry I was, or how gladly now I would creep to your feet as humbly as even you could wish, just to hear you say, 'I forgive you'—just to know the fate of my little child."

Her head drooped ; the white lips grew whiter ; pain, sharp and torturing, taxed beyond all limits her already weakened powers of endurance. With one deep, shuddering sigh she sank back on the hard, rough rocks—insensible.

How long the way seemed to Loveday ! How tired she felt ! The sky was growing darker every moment, and the wind more keen and chill. Panting and breathless she at last reached the little cottage, and dashed

impetuously through its open doorway, and into the little firelit parlour.

"Daddy!" she cried, wildly.

Then suddenly voice and strength seemed to forsake her. For there in the dusk a tall figure stood, and held out welcoming arms, and all memory of anything or any one was lost as, with a cry glad and sweet as that of nestling bird, she flew into that long-coveted embrace, sobbing out the name which had lived in her memory and faltered in her prayers so many weary months.

"Oh, father! father! You have come back—you have come back!"

Swiftly the moments sped away. Outside, beyond the firelight and warmth of the little parlour, the storm gathered, and the leaden clouds grew darker. But Loveday had forgotten her errand, and sat there on her fairy Prince's knee, listening to his voice, gazing into his face, her little heart throbbing and beating madly with the great joy and the greater wonder of his presence.

Suddenly memory returned. She sprang from his knee with a little terrified cry.

"Oh, where is Daddy?" she cried, wildly. "Oh, father, how wicked of me. I forgot everything, and the poor lady—she is lying out there on the Gull Rock. She can't move, her leg is broken. Oh, they must send the boat for her and bring her here."

She flew off into the kitchen, where old Penywern and Dick were seated, and poured out her tale to them with passionate incoherence.

They looked at one another, grave and anxious.

"The tide will be up," said Dick. "Twill be rare and difficult getting the boat near the rock, and there's a storm rising, too."

"But some one must go," said the stranger, who had followed Loveday in her sudden flight. "Can I help you?" he asked, eagerly. "I'm a good oarsman, and can manage a boat fairly well, and if, as the child says, the lady has met with an accident, you'll need strong arms to carry her down that awful place."

"Yes, you're right, sir, and you're welcome to come along if you don't mind a bit of rough sea. Bring the lantern, Dick, and some rope. Come, there's no time to lose."

They hurried off, and Loveday stood at the gate of the little cottage, watching

them launch the boat, and wondering how the poor lady was, yet too glad of heart in her own innocent joy to have room for any forebodings.

Presently the rain and wind drove her within doors, and she went back to her little low chair by the fire, and lost herself in happy, bewildering dreams of all that was in store for her.

The old clock struck half-hour—hour—half-hour—hour; but the time did not seem long, nor was she lonely. Yet three hours had passed before sound of steps and voices reached her ears, and three drenched and forlorn-looking figures staggered into the warm, bright kitchen, carrying a limp and helpless form, which they laid on the wide, old-fashioned settle.

Loveday sprang hastily up. The woman who took charge of her and kept the little cottage in order, was already there and stooping over the stiff and motionless figure. She unloosed her cloak and removed the soaked and dripping bonnet.

The child put her warm, flushed face against that white and rigid one. The loosened hair—brown and wavy like her own—fell in a heavy mass around it.

"How cold she is!" cried Loveday, shrinking in sudden terror from that chill contact.

As she did so the light fell full upon the woman's face, and revealed it to the gaze of that one rescuer, who, all unconsciously, had faced peril, hardship, almost death to-night to save her.

He sprang to her side, and his face was scarcely less white than her own as he gazed, half in terror, half in incredulous fear, anger, compassion at the rigid form and closed eyes.

"Great Heaven!" he cried below his breath; "to meet at last, and like this!"

"Who is she, father? Do you know her?" cried Loveday, wonderingly.

He did not answer, only stepped aside and motioned to the woman to resume her offices. Old Penywern and he left the kitchen then, and Dick hurried off for the doctor.

But long before he arrived they knew that his journey would be useless. Cold, pain, and exposure had done their work too well. The weakened frame, and weaker heart, had no power to rally from the shock.

Awestruck and frightened, Loveday crept into the room where her father and the old sailor were talking.

"The child knows nothing?" she heard

old Penywern say. "Surely, sir, she need know nothing now."

"I will take her away with me," her father answered. "Strange that in this out-of-the-way corner of the world Fate should have destined such a meeting."

"Stranger still that the poor lady should never have known whose child she was so fond of," said the old Cornishman. "You'll forgive her, now, sir. I'm sure she's known suffering and sorrow. Her face shows that."

"I forgive her, Heaven knows," he said, huskily. "She broke my heart, and ruined my home, and made my child motherless; but, perhaps I was too hard, too exacting. Neither of us was faultless."

A little hand touched his softly; a little face, pale and wistful, looked up to his own. He knelt down and drew the child into his arms, and bowed his head on the soft brown curls.

"Have you come to comfort me, Loveday? Shall we face life together, you and I?"

There was no answer save the mute caress of the childish lips, the clinging touch of the childish arms.

Loveday never asked and never knew more of her history.

A HOUSE OF ECHOES.

By C. L. PIRKIS.

Author of "Lady Lovelace," "A Red Sister," etc.

CHAPTER I.

It stood on the edge of one of the bleakest of the bleak Yorkshire moors—a square-built, unpretending house, surrounded by a small garden, in the midst of which a big board proclaimed that "this desirable family residence" was to be let or sold. The fact had been thus proclaimed for so many years that its owner had begun to despair of ever finding a tenant for it. The house had somehow got for itself an ill name. Its latest occupant had been a man of surly temper, who had lived the life of a recluse, and who had one morning been found lying dead in his bed. To these facts in course of time the usual element of the weird and supernatural had been linked by the good people of the widely-scattered hamlet, and belated drovers and farm labourers, who had occasion to cross the moor after nightfall, were wont to testify to all sorts of unearthly noises which they

averred had proceeded from the house as they passed.

Mr. Simon Geldart knew something of all this when he bought the house on his return to England after twenty years' absence in America. He had been born within fifteen miles of the place, and Yorkshire air suited him. Also he had sundry investments in certain collieries in the neighbourhood which wanted looking after. Last and most weighty consideration of all, it was to be had at a low figure. Mr. Geldart, although a wealthy man, looked twice at a penny before he spent it, and when he heard from his Yorkshire correspondents that the house could be had for next to nothing, he laughed at its ill repute, said to himself that a bargain was a bargain any day of the week, and there and then settled the matter.

Simon Geldart had cut himself adrift from home and home ties as a young man, and had sailed away to the New World with one fixed resolve in his mind—that of making money and rising in life. To this end he had worked early and worked late, kept himself clear of love-making, alms-giving, and kindred follies, and by the time he was fifty years of age had attained his heart's desire. Then his health had begun to fail; the doctors advised rest, change, recreation.

Mr. Geldart thought to himself that with "rest, change, and his native air," he might combine a little business, look after sundry of his English investments—notably those Yorkshire collieries which had given him some little anxiety—and search out the relatives who remained to him, and see if among them he could find a niece, who might, should necessity arise, be found willing to fill the responsible post of nurse and housekeeper to him.

Of these relatives, by his own choice, he knew next to nothing. He had had but one brother, Dick, a hare-brained scamp of a fellow, and from that bothersome five years back had come a pathetic little message—sent from his death-bed—begging his dear brother Simon to look after his wife and children. The letter had been laid on one side and had faded from his memory, until his possible need some day for a nurse had recalled to his mind the fact that "Mrs. Dick"—as he had mentally christened his brother's widow—had a quiverful of children.

Thus it came about one morning that Mrs. Dick, seated in the morning-room of

her little house at Hampstead, with a pile of unneeded garments before her, and a packet of unpaid tradesmen's bills at her right hand, was startled by the announcement that Mr. Simon Geldart, of Chicago, wished to see her.

Mrs. Geldart went into her drawing-room to be greeted, not a little abruptly, by a small, very thin, very sallow, very sharp-featured gentleman, with the words:

"So you are Dick's widow!"

This abrupt exclamation was only the prelude to a string of questions equally curt and uncereemonious, and Mrs. Geldart grew more and more nervous.

"I wish Aileen were at home," she thought, feeling how much more easily her bright, light-hearted eldest daughter would acquit herself in the circumstances.

Aloud she said: "Of course you will like to see Dick's children?"

"That depends. What are they like? How many are there to see?"

"Ten," she answered, with the ghost of a smile. "Aileen is the eldest—just twenty. She is small, slight, dark; pretty, they say——"

"Who comes next?" interrupted Uncle Simon.

"Dick—just sixteen. We lost two between him and Aileen." And here the mother's voice faltered.

"What a mercy!" he ejaculated under his breath.

"Then come twins, Harry and Jack," continued the lady, not hearing the ejaculation, "and then Milly, then Ernest, then Madge, then Tiny——"

"For Heaven's sake, stop!" he cried. "Do you think I can carry all those names in my head?"

"I'll go and fetch some of them," said the mother, thinking that her pretty curly darlings could not fail to make an indelible impression on the rich uncle's memory.

"Stop," again he cried. "Small children and rowdy boys are my abomination. I'll make the acquaintance of your elder ones, but it must be in my own fashion."

Then he went on to say that he had bought a house in the country—on the Yorkshire moors—and would like his eldest niece to stay there with him for a time.

"She can keep house for me—I hope, by the way, that you've taught her to be thrifty, and a good manager—and prevent my being robbed by the servants, and tradespeople, and——"

But at that moment the door opened,

and the eldest niece, bright and fresh from a morning's walk, came in.

She was, as her mother had said, small and slight, with hair black and glossy as a raven's wing, and large dark eyes which could say just whatever she chose them to say. They said an undeniable demur when her uncle's invitation was told her with many grateful expressions by her mother.

Her uncle's sharp face and sharper voice did not fascinate her, and the prospect of even a week's stay with him in a lonely country house was not attractive.

"I must ask Tom first," she said, her clear dark skin flushing a deep crimson.

"Who on earth is Tom?" asked the uncle, sharply, turning to Mrs. Geldart.

Before she could explain that "Tom" was the Rev. Thomas Trevor, the curate of the parish, to whom Aileen was engaged to be married, the girl had disappeared.

It was the old, old story. Tom and Aileen had been thrown together at church decorations, and in parish work. He was a handsome, stalwart young fellow of six-and-twenty, and would have looked every whit as well in a gold-braided uniform with a sword at his side as he did in his white surplice, with its bachelor's hood.

So it came about one Christmas Eve, when the church had been made as ugly as holly, red flannel, and cotton wool at times can make it, and Aileen, with her hammer and nails, was descending a flight of steps, that Tom took her hand in his to help her down. He grasped it so tightly, however, that she exclaimed: "Oh, you've hurt my hand." Upon which he replied: "Not half so much as you've hurt my heart," and the thing was done.

There could be no denying that, looked at from a pecuniary point of view, the engagement was a highly imprudent one. Mrs. Geldart seemed for the first time to see the full measure of its imprudence as she sat answering her brother-in-law's sharp, short questions respecting "Tom" and his "prospects." Aileen had so few pleasures in her girl's life that the mother had not had the heart to forbid a lover to her, more especially a lover with Tom's genial ways and good heart. Now, however, when Uncle Simon, in cold, contemptuous tones, discussed the affair, she began to feel ashamed of herself for having given her sanction to what he was pleased to call "a piece of arrant folly."

"The father is a country rector, you say, with five other sons to provide for," he

exclaimed. "Good goodness! It must be broken off at once, or I'll have nothing more to do with any of you."

The mother did not dare to repeat these and kindred speeches verbatim to Aileen; but when in due course there came a letter from Uncle Simon, formally inviting the girl to spend a month with him on the Yorkshire moors, she waxed eloquent over the advantages which might accrue to the whole family if only the uncle's favour could be secured.

"Think of me, Aileen, and my life of toil in the vain endeavour to make both ends meet," she pleaded. "Think of your brothers who want schooling; your little sisters who want clothes."

"They shouldn't want for a single thing, any one of them, if I could help it," exclaimed Tom, who chanced to be present. Then he pathetically turned his pockets inside out to show how empty they were. "I'm not extravagant, but I haven't a sou with which to help anybody. Oh, Aileen, Aileen!" he exclaimed, with a sudden burst of deep feeling. "I know it was very wrong of me to tie you down to marry a poor beggar like me; but how could I help it? What else in life could I do?"

And Aileen's dark eyes upturned to his answered very plainly that she did not see what else in life he could have done.

CHAPTER II.

So Uncle Simon's invitation was accepted, and Aileen departed on a month's visit to her newly-found relative, with not a few misgivings as to the amount of pleasure she would derive from that visit.

But, gloomy as her anticipations were, they fell far short of the reality.

She arrived at her destination late in the evening, and, tired with her long journey, made her escape early to her room. Consequently it was not until the next morning that the full dreariness of the house and its surroundings stood revealed to her.

Go to which window she might, nothing but miles of scrubby moorland met her eye, bounded on one side by the white, pebbly road, which wound away for three miles, as she knew by her experience of overnight, before it reached habitation of any sort.

The weather was bleak and cold even for a Yorkshire March, and low, overhanging clouds foretelling a downfall of some sort completed the desolateness of the picture.

Within there was nothing to counterbalance the outside dreariness. The rooms were large, and but scantily furnished; the walls were innocent of pictures; the windows were but slenderly draped. Assuredly Uncle Simon, when he had commissioned his upholsterer, had not allowed a margin for either ornaments or luxuries. The long, narrow passages, which connected one room with another, were even destitute of carpets, and every footfall on them awakened a succession of echoes which seemed to answer and re-answer each other endlessly. There were not, however, many footfalls to rouse those echoes when all were told.

"You must make yourself at home, and look after yourself," Uncle Simon had said to her on her arrival, and Aileen in due course found that that meant that if she did not look after herself there was no one in the house who would do it for her—the whole establishment consisting of a deaf, elderly woman, and a lad who attended to the horse, and at odd intervals helped in the house.

Coming straight from a small London villa, into which was crowded a large family, and which was kept merry by blithe young voices from morning till night, it was only natural that Aileen should feel herself oppressed by the silence and gloom which surrounded her. "A whole month of this!" thought the girl despairingly. "Why, I shall only be fit for a lunatic asylum when I get back. Uncle Simon has been here barely three weeks, and see what it has done for him."

Although Aileen had only seen her uncle for a few minutes in her mother's drawing-room, the change in him was sufficiently marked to arrest her attention. He looked older by at least ten years; heavy-eyed and haggard; his face was sallow to cadaverousness, and his features were sharp and pinched as features could well be. He grumbled incessantly at everything from morning till night; at the deaf old woman even, whom he had brought from London because her cooking had suited him, and whose dinners and luncheons now were an unfailing source of discontent; at the house also, which at first had seemed to him such an uncommonly good bargain.

"I shall get rid of it for just what it will fetch," he said to Aileen; "but at present I have had only one offer for it—from a man who wants it just for building material."

Aileen's exclamations of surprise called

forth a string of complaints against the house. It wasn't only that it was ill-arranged and draughty, but it was noisy.

"Noisy!" cried Aileen. "To me it seems silent as the grave itself. Except the wind and the echoes, there isn't a sound in it from morning till night."

"And isn't that enough?" cried her uncle, snappishly. "The wind has never ceased since I've been here. It has got into my head, I suppose; I've a horrible singing in my ears which almost deafens me and prevents my sleeping at night."

Aileen ventured to suggest that it might be as well to consult a doctor.

"Doctor!" he exclaimed. "Do you suppose that I need reminding that my health requires attention? I've already sent for one. If I don't look after number one, I should like to know who would."

Then he fell to grumbling at the doctor—a man called Fleetwood—who lived at a village about ten miles distant.

But he did more than grumble at Aileen; he poured out all the vials of his wrath upon her head a day or two afterwards, when a letter, addressed in a masculine hand, was brought to her in his presence.

Part of Aileen's daily duty, and the part she dreaded most, was the two hours she was called upon to spend in her uncle's study every morning. When the girl had first arrived at the house she had said to herself:

"No piano, no nice books, no lovely long rambles out of doors this bleak weather; whatever shall I find to do from morning till night?"

She very soon found that Uncle Simon knew how to fill up her time from morning till night, without the aid of piano, or books, or lovely long walks. "I suppose you know how to use your needle," he had said to her. That was a prelude to throwing the making of a stock of household linen on her hands.

"I suppose you can keep accounts," was his next query, and then the household books were committed to her care. And last in order came, "I suppose you can use your pen!" and then for two hours daily she was shut in his study with him, writing at his dictation the driest of dry business letters.

She was thus occupied when a letter from her lover was brought to her—the first she had received in her uncle's presence. The big, masculine hand, so unlike Mrs. Geldart's nervous penmanship, caught his eye.

"Who's that from?" he demanded, curtly.

"From Tom," answered Aileen, defiant in manner but nervous at heart, for she felt what was hanging over her head.

Then the storm had burst. "Confounded young curate," was the mildest of the phrases by which Tom was designated. The engagement, "the arrant piece of folly," was to be put an end to immediately, and if Aileen was found writing to or receiving letters from the young man, she was to be "packed off home at once."

"Packed off home at once!" The words had a delightful sound in them, Aileen thought, as she made her escape with her letter to her own room. "It's horrible! intolerable! I'll write to Tom at once, and tell him to come and fetch me home; it's altogether past enduring!" she exclaimed, there and then fetching her portfolio and inkstand. But second thoughts, bringing with them the recollection of her mother's farewell words, checked the defiant mood.

"Aileen," Mrs. Geldart had said, as she had kissed and put her daughter into the train, "I implore you do your utmost to make a favourable impression on your uncle. Think not only of your own wishes and likings, but of your brothers—your sisters—me. He can do so much for us all if he chooses."

Aileen paused with her pen in her hand.

"No, I must try and put up with it; it can't be for long," she mused. "When I get home, I'll make mother write to him and tell him how good and true Tom is, and that it would be utterly, utterly impossible for us to give each other up. Yes, and I'll send mother a line now, and ask her to make Tom understand that he had better not write to me while I'm here."

If Aileen had known the task her mother had set herself to perform during her absence, she would scarcely have relied so implicitly upon her good offices. Tom, like the good-hearted young fellow that he was, had gone round to Aileen's home as usual, saying to himself that the whole family must sadly want cheering up now that the sunshine had gone out of the house. The pleasant round game, however, which he intended to set going, had to be put on one side for a quiet talk, to which Mrs. Geldart invited him in a room apart, a talk in which the lady had set before

him in plain language the unpromising state of his own prospects, and what a dismal future it would be for Aileen if she were engaged to him, say for the next ten years, and then married to him on an income something under three hundred a year.

Tom had gone back to his lodgings that night with a heart as heavy as lead.

CHAPTER III.

A FORTNIGHT of Aileen's visit slowly wore itself away, each one of the lagging days, as it passed, seeming drearier than the last. No doubt she had been very heroic in forbidding, at what seemed the voice of duty, Tom to write to her; but none the less, she felt that a glimpse of the well-known writing, if only on the back of an envelope, would have done not a little to speed the weary hours.

During that fortnight, an unbroken continuance of bleak, rough weather kept her a prisoner to the house, and made her entirely dependent upon Uncle Simon alike for society and employment.

With her attention thus riveted upon him, she could not fail to note a curious, undefinable change that seemed to be passing over him. It was not only that he seemed to be growing older-looking, thinner, more cadaverous with every day that passed, but his habits, his manner even seemed to be strangely altering. He would come downstairs in the morning looking like a man who had slept badly, would eat next to nothing for breakfast, and then, instead of setting to work upon his letters, as he had done when first she had arrived, he would settle himself into his easy-chair and fall into a little doze, from which he would awaken with a sudden start and an exclamation. He grumbled less and less each day, she fancied, and his voice was, if not soft and pleasing, at least a little less acrimonious. He was constantly putting his hand to his ears as if the noises in them troubled him, and once or twice, coming suddenly into the room, she found him standing still, in a listening attitude, as if he had heard something, but was not quite sure what.

She began to grow alarmed. A slight circumstance occurring about this time brought her fears to a head. She was seated one morning with him in his study, arranging his papers as usual, while he reclined in his easy-chair with eyes closed, when suddenly he started, and turning to her, exclaimed:

"What are you sighing for? Wanting to be home again, eh?"

Aileen was astonished.

"I did not open my lips," she answered.

He stared at her blankly.

"It must have been the wind," cried Aileen, sorely puzzled. "Listen how it's moaning in the chimney now."

Her uncle made no reply, but turned away, putting his hand to his ear as if the sound were still there.

Aileen was in some things wise and thoughtful beyond her years. It occurred to her that it might be as well if she were to waylay Dr. Fleetwood on one of his visits to the house, and give him a hint on matters which perhaps Uncle Simon had not thought it necessary to mention. She had heard of all sorts of dangerous illnesses beginning with noises in the ear; it might be as well to be on the alert.

Dr. Fleetwood had made an impression upon her the very reverse of that which he had made upon her uncle. In appearance he was tall and slight, and scarcely looked his age; he had a kind smile and a dreamy, far-away look about the eyes, as of a man who felt his feet to be on the edge of another world. His manner, though grave, invited confidence.

It was easy for her to tell him all the strange symptoms she had noted in Uncle Simon.

He listened patiently.

"I'll bear in mind what you've told me, and will come again to-morrow," was all he said. But, as he said good-bye to her, for a moment he eyed her keenly, curiously, as if puzzling over the bond there could be between this bright young girl and the sordid money-maker, whom he recollected as a most uninteresting lad in the years gone by.

Aileen herself, however, if she had been cross-questioned, could easily have explained the fact.

"If he were in good health, and I were free to do as I liked, I should love to tease and worry him almost out of his life," she would have said, honestly; "but because he is getting ill, and looks wretched and unhappy, I can't help pitying him and doing my best for him."

More than ever did she feel inclined to pity him that night, when she went into his study and for a moment stood, unnoticed, watching him as he lay back in his chair with eyes closed and hand pressed tightly over one ear, as if to dull the sound of something that pained him.

That study was the most comfortable room in the house, for Uncle Simon, in accordance with his usual practice of "looking after number one," had had it specially fitted to suit his convenience. There were all sorts of big, comfortable screens, and sand-bags and wedges to the windows to keep out draughts. It was, however, so much waste labour on that night at any rate. The candles flickered, the smoke came down the chimney in puffs, even the carpet swelled up and down with the gusts that contrived somehow to find their way in through the flooring.

As the night wore on, it blew little short of a hurricane. Aileen was glad to tumble into bed as fast as possible, cover up her ears with the coverlet, and try to conjure herself to sleep with happy thoughts of the dear ones at home. It was all in vain, however; not till nearly daybreak when the wind began to lull, did she fall into a troubled, restless sleep—a sleep, however, from which she soon awakened with a great start. Sitting upright in bed, she asked herself what had aroused her.

The wind had settled into a moan now that seemed to be as much in as outside the house. Aileen, as she listened, could have fancied that the noise of the wind—its voice, so to speak, not itself—had got into the room and was sweeping past her ear. A grey, chill dawn was creeping in at the windows. She felt it was impossible to get to sleep again; she felt impelled to get up, put on her dressing-gown, and see if Uncle Simon had called her. It was just possible, she thought, that he might not feel so well and was wanting her.

Half-way to his room, however, she met Uncle Simon himself, with a white, scared look on his face.

"Was it you, Aileen?" he asked, hurriedly, nervously, in a voice not like his own.

Aileen began to explain how she had started in her sleep, and thought he might have called her.

He scarcely seemed to hear her. He looked all round him in an odd, puzzled fashion.

"I could have vowed—yes, I am positive," he said, "some one gave a loud 'ha, ha,' at my bedroom door. Did you not hear it?"

Aileen could only repeat her experience of the night.

"It was the wind—it must have been the wind—it could have been nothing else but that which woke us both," she said over

and over again, gathering courage from her own assertions.

An anxious, troubled day for Aileen followed. Her fears for Uncle Simon's health were merging now into one great fear—for his reason. His manner assuredly was not reassuring. He was strangely quiet and abstracted all that day; he did not sit down to any meal with her, but remained in his study in his easy-chair, reclining with one hand covering his ear.

Only once could Aileen get him to take the slightest interest in what was going on around him. That was when she read aloud to him a letter which the morning's post had brought. It was from the builder with whom Uncle Simon had already opened negotiations, making a final offer for the house which he intended to pull down and use for building materials.

Then Uncle Simon grew excited. He jumped to his feet.

"Send a telegram to him, saying I accept his terms. Send at once; do you hear?" he cried. He gave Aileen no rest till the thing was done, and then he relapsed into his former lassitude.

It seemed to Aileen as if Dr. Fleetwood would never come that day. It was not until the afternoon was fading into twilight that her eager ears caught the sound of wheels coming along the pebbly road. She ran to the front door to meet him, and then started back, and stood still in simple, blank astonishment. She scarcely dared to credit her eyesight, for there, seated beside him in his high phaeton, was one whom she as little expected to see as she did a visitant from another world—Tom Trevor.

The doctor was the first to alight. He hastened to explain.

"I overtook this gentleman midway between here and the station, found he was coming to your house, and offered to give him a lift. Mr. Geldart is in his study? Thank you. Don't trouble; I'll find my way there."

Tom's sudden appearance had set Aileen's heart beating. He looked white, forlorn; not like a man tired with a long journey, but like one sick at heart.

"Tell me quickly," she cried, as the doctor disappeared; "is mother ill? Is anything wrong at home?"

"Wrong!" answered the young man, bitterly. "Everything is wrong everywhere. Look here, Aileen, I may as well tell you as quickly as possible, and be done with it. Your mother has been talking to me about our engagement, and how wicked

it would be for me to keep you tied to me for years, when you might do so much better for yourself now that your rich uncle has come upon the scene. And—and—well, I lay awake last night thinking over it all, and it came into my head how that Lent is coming on, and I'm always preaching to the people about the duty of giving up our own selfish wills and likings for the good of others; and so—and so——" Here he broke off for a moment, and then brought his words out in a rush, as if afraid he might never speak them: "I've come, Aileen, to set you free!"

His last words rang out almost defiantly. They reached the ears of Uncle Simon as he sat *tête-à-tête* with his doctor.

"Whose voice is that?" he asked, and then, as if distrustful of his own powers of hearing, he prevented the doctor's reply by a string of hasty, nervous questions about himself and his health. What was the matter with him? Was he very ill? Was he going to die?

The doctor did not for a moment reply.

"A poor creature, this," he thought to himself. "Just what one might have expected the Simon Geldart of twenty years back to grow into."

Aloud he said:

"You are in a peculiar, not a dangerous condition of health. I've already told you you can do far more for yourself than I can do for you. Drugs are no good to you; you must alter your manner of life."

"It's those confounded noises in my ear that are at the bottom of it all; they torment me all day, and prevent my sleeping at night."

"You look overdone for want of sleep; you'll most likely drop off so soon as I am out of the room. Those noises you complain of are one of the surest symptoms of an overworked brain. You've been too ardent in your pursuit of wealth; you must rest now, and take care of your health."

"Ah, I see," murmured Uncle Simon. "Take care of myself—look after number one; that's what you mean."

A curious expression passed over the doctor's face.

"Look after number one," he repeated, slowly. "Strange to say, the last time I heard that expression, to notice it, was in this very room, from the lips of the man who last tenanted this house."

Uncle Simon started.

"Tell me all you know about that

man!" he exclaimed, eagerly. "I've a special reason for wishing to learn something about him."

"There's not much to tell. He was a surly, ill-conditioned creature; wealthy, but didn't want to be bothered by his relatives, so he cut himself adrift, took a house out here on the moors, and looked after number one."

Uncle Simon shifted a little uneasily in his chair.

"I used to call and see him occasionally, and try to make him take an interest in other people's joys and sorrows. Not a bit of it! All he cared for was himself and his own comforts."

Again Uncle Simon made an uneasy movement.

The doctor went on:

"It was all very well so long as he was in health; but when he fell ill, and not a soul, friend or relative, came near him, the tables were turned on him. I saw him the night before he was found dead in his bed, and I shall never forget his look as he turned and said to me: 'It's poor number one now, doctor!' Ab, that was in rather a different voice to the one in which he used to say: 'Mine's a jolly life, doctor! Not a soul to bother me! Ha, ha!'"

Uncle Simon gave a great start.

"He said that—in that voice—with that laugh!" he exclaimed. "Fleetwood, believe it or not, as you please, but I've heard him. That man may be dead and buried, but he has left his laugh—his voice—behind him; I heard it outside my bedroom door last night."

The doctor did not seem in the least disconcerted.

"What of that?" he said, quietly. "Our voices are just the one part of ourselves that we can't take out of the world with us. Our bodies go into the ground, our souls go—ah, well!—to their own place, but our voices we leave behind us. The air, that has been flawed, notched, impressed by them, holds them as surely as any phonograph holds a human voice."

Uncle Simon stared at him with a look that said: "You are getting out of my depth now." Then his eyes drooped wearily.

The doctor went on: "So that, as one of our leading mathematicians has well said, 'The air is one vast library on whose pages are for ever written all that man has ever said and woman ever whispered.' Only one here and there has his ears finely tuned enough to catch these voices. Nine out of

every ten will say that they hear the wind rushing by, or that they have noises in their ears which plague them; but all the same, the voices are there, and—" here the doctor's voice fell to a low, solemn tone, "when the last great assize is called, and the earth gives up its dead, then will the air give up its voices, and every man will rise or fall by his own words; yes, will literally be judged out of his own mouth."

"Ha, ha!"

Uncle Simon rubbed his eyes and started nearly out of his chair. Was that the doctor's voice giving that loud, discordant laugh, or was it that other voice which he knew only too well? He rubbed his eyes again. The room was dark now, save for a flickering tongue of flame which leapt from the hollow fire and showed that the doctor's chair was empty. He had evidently departed when Uncle Simon's eyelids had drooped for want of sleep. He passed his hand over his forehead and sat staring at the vacant chair. Could it be that all the doctor had been saying was true, and would that poor miserable creature's laugh of selfish jollity go ringing on to eternity?

The thought was horrible. He felt oppressed. He could fancy that the air around him was laden with human voices. The noises in his ear began ringing and swelling to a perfect tumult now, a tumult of loud "ha, ha's," of deep-drawn sighs, of a voice strangely like his own, saying, "Take care of number one!" of a long drawn-out, pitiful wail that went moaning, "Poor number one, poor number one!"

Over all this tumult of sound there suddenly came to him a voice he knew well enough—a strained, tear-laden voice—that of Aileen, saying, "Good-bye, Tom, since it must be. Oh, why did he come all the way from Chicago just to break our hearts?"

Uncle Simon could bear it no longer. He rose tumultuously to his feet, and threw open his door.

"Stop!" he cried, in a loud though husky voice. "Don't say that. For Heaven's sake don't let that go on record against me too!"

Tom and Aileen turned to see Uncle Simon, with a look on his face which had never been there before, reaching a hand to each.

"Be happy," he said. "Yes, be happy as soon as ever you like. Marry each other to-morrow if you like, and I'll find you a house and an income, and look after your

mother and your brothers and your sisters—the whole ten of them—and do my best to make every one of you happy."

And he was as good as his word.

"A WHISPER."

By ESMÉ STUART.

Author of "Keatels of Greystone," etc. etc.

SPRING had suddenly stepped upon the earth with dainty feet, and she walked about whispering in the ears of lovers, thus causing them to dream beautiful dreams of their loved ones. Usually she varies these whispered tales, and makes each vision applicable; but on one particular occasion she made a mistake, and the result of her duplicate story was that she called up exactly the same vision to Pen Thornhill and Stephen Atwater, and that vision was the sweet, laughing, provoking, fascinating picture of Pensie Willemet. When these two men awoke, they made the same resolution, which was that they would go and ask Pensie on that very day if she would listen to reason, and if this listening could bring forth the answer "yes" to a certain question.

Stephen Atwater had lately lost his father, so he was now the young Squire and owner of the old Moat House, which without was grey, and picturesque, and ivy-covered, but within dull and silent; in fact, it was waiting for a young mistress. Stephen could find no reason why Pensie should say "no," but unfortunately who could be sure of her answers? She was a flirt, there was no doubt about it—a flirt who made the men her devoted slaves, and led them on because of that innate charm about her, and because of those sweet, gracious words which were so enchanting, till—well, till you heard them bestowed upon the next worshippinger at the Pensie shrine. Then your soul recoiled, and you wanted Pensie to be what she could not be—cold, haughty, and severe.

Stephen Atwater thought of the Moat House, of his rent-roll, of his good looks, and lastly of his passionate wish to possess Pensie, and he determined to try his luck. There was but one man whom he really feared, and this was Pen Thornhill, who now lived in the same house with Pensie. The neighbourhood generally said that

Miss Penelope Willemet would certainly marry Captain Thornhill, who was her guardian's nephew and his heir.

Pensie lived at Hurstmere, a modern mansion two miles away from the Moat House—two miles of country lanes now clothed in the exquisite tender green which poets love so much, and which, in spite of themselves, makes them sing plaintive songs. Mr. Thornhill was a rich engineer, who had made money by laying railways for South American Republics, and who having lost one fortune and made a second, had determined to retire on his riches and not tempt fate a second time. He therefore left the Republics, and brought away his money and the orphan child of a friend, a young engineer, who had married a South American girl, and who soon after had been killed on the line he was helping to construct. His widow lived long enough to see her baby girl, and to hear Mr. Thornhill's promise that she should be as his own child. He had nobly fulfilled that promise. He was too just to make her his heir—that privilege belonged by right to his nephew Pen—but he settled a yearly income upon her of five hundred pounds, and gave her the remainder in love.

She was the joy of his life—she and Pen, who till now had seldom been at home, however. He had entered the army, and had been sent to India and to the Gold Coast. He had helped in a little war here and a smaller war there, and lastly he had become a captain much sooner than he had expected, which is saying a good deal, for officers' expectations are boundless. But then Mr. Thornhill fell ill, and became a permanent invalid, so he asked Pen if he would very much mind leaving the army and settling down at Hurstmere to look after the property. Pen obeyed at once without saying whether or no he did mind, and came home to Hurstmere to be the prop of the house. After this it was the Captain here, and the Captain there, and, of course, Pensie at once took possession of him, and he also at once fell in love with her; at least, he had done that some time before, for to be many weeks with Pensie was fatal. Envy and jealousy had to own she was lovely, but they added, to sweeten the confession, that she had no heart and that she could not be trusted.

It was a beautiful May day when Stephen Atwater took the short cut through the copse and the meadows,

determined to try his luck. His cousins, the Kempes, who lived not far from Hurstmere, saw him go by, and Phoebe, who, people said, meant to marry the Squire, felt sure that Stevie was going after "that girl," and her heart sank down very low; but she thought, "Perhaps she won't have him; most likely she means to marry the Captain, who will be richer than Stevie, and is, as every one can see, in spite of his quiet ways, madly in love with her."

Stephen found Pensie in the garden, where she was picking flowers and going from blossom to blossom like a beautiful humming-bird, now and then singing to herself a quaint song taught her by her old nurse. She was so young, so happy, all the world was bright for her; and as for love, she had so much of it, it seemed difficult to choose, or to know her own mind as to which special lover she preferred—Stevie's quick, passionate, importunate, arrogant love, or Pen's silent, deep, almost authoritative worship, which sometimes made her feel like a naughty child. At such moments she rebelled and said she wished to be a woman; but then, again, at other times she felt inclined to lay her head on Pen's shoulder, and to tell him that he could make her good if he tried, and—that he had better try!

But now here was Stephen himself, and her basket dropped from her fingers, and before she could fly away the Squire's hands had seized both hers, and he was pouring out a torrent of passionate love. Pensie was frightened; she had never seen or heard anything like this before—an outpouring of words which might be compared with the sudden breaking forth of molten lava or liberated waters from a reservoir, sights which are at once both beautiful and terrible, but from which you instinctively turn away.

"Oh, Mr. Atwater, don't!" she said, turning her head away, though her hands were fast held.

"But, Pensie, my darling, I must speak. You don't know what you are making me suffer; you don't know how I've resisted this love, but it is useless. I love you madly when you smile on me, and I almost curse you when you seem indifferent; and now—now I must have an answer; I must, or——"

"Oh, hush! hush! you don't mean all this. I can't give you an answer now; I must think. I—I don't know my own mind. I'm so young—I—please, please go

away, and perhaps some day—in a day or two—"

"No; now, Pensie; now, my darling. What can I say to persuade you? I love you so much. I've loved you till I've—good Heavens! Pensie, till I've nearly cried with the pain like a child."

"Not now—not now," repeated Pensie, beginning to cry. "I must speak to uncle, and oh! I don't know my own mind. Come back in two days, and—oh, do go, I hear somebody coming."

Stephen felt bound to obey that pleading voice, though at the same time he would have liked to have taken her up in his arms and run away with her—far away from his only possible rival, Captain Thornhill. Phoebe Kempe, who saw him pass back, read some of his thoughts, for he forgot his accustomed nod towards the windows of The Laurels; but Phoebe forgot none of her envy and malice, in thinking of "that girl."

Left alone, Pensie sat down in the summer-house and cried; then she dried her tears and laughed, and then she thought she would take a walk. It so happened that the Captain had been out all the afternoon, and he, too, had made up his mind to try his luck that day. On reaching the gate which led out of the grounds, he met Pensie. She looked a little pale, a little subdued, and entirely fascinating in her unusual gentleness.

"Oh, Pen! how strange that I should meet you!" she said, as he turned back with her, and walked by her side in silence for a few minutes. Then he seized his courage in his two hands and spoke gently.

"Pensie, I want to say something to you; I think you must know it already. You are so young, so beautiful, and I know many men admire you, and perhaps love you; but I wonder if any love you as much as I do? Oh, my darling, I am afraid of letting you see all that is in my heart, because—I want you to be happy in your own way. I don't want you to imagine that you are not free to choose the man you love best. Uncle will think the same, I know; but, Pensie, I love you with all my heart, and soul, and with all my life—yes, all my life. Tell me if I must keep silence, or if I may speak."

Poor Pensie, it was really a trying day for her, for she was experiencing that you can have too much love, and that it is safer never to flirt with more than one lover at a time. Pensie recognised, now that it was too late, that she was a flirt,

and that the result was that she did not know her own mind.

"Oh, Pen, don't, don't say any more. I don't know. It has all come on the same day."

"The discovery of my love, darling?"

"No; but—never mind. Give me two days, Pen; yes, you must, and then I'll try and think it out, and—I do hope I shall be able to say yes—or no, then." She slipped her hand into his arm and added, cheerfully: "Now be the dear, good, obedient Pen of old times, and let's take a walk and not talk of anything but nice things."

So the Captain did as he was bid, and the two sauntered on as they had often done before, and Pensie tried to put away the idea that she had better make up her mind at once, and be honest at least with one of her two lovers. Pen was Pen, good, kind, thoughtful; but she knew him so well, there was nothing new to discover in him, no unexplored land; whilst Stevie had a nature she could not quite understand; he took possession of her, he adored her, he was masterful, vain, perhaps, but—she was the least little bit afraid of him. Pensie really could not, she said to herself, know which of the two she should choose; but in two days she must decide, of course she must.

Phoebe Kempe saw these two go out and come in again; saw how Pensie had her hand on the Captain's arm, and heard her laugh—a laugh which was so sweet, so rich, so joyous.

"The horrid little flirt!" she said, and she determined to save Stevie from his fate, even if it cost him some pain, and her some little twisting of facts.

Two days went by, and during that time Pensie put away all thought, and eased her conscience by being specially loving and attentive to her guardian; and he, guessing that Pen was trying his luck, found means to say a few things in his nephew's favour. This made Pensie still more miserable and still more uncertain. On the third day the Captain waited till he saw Pensie in the garden, hovering among the flowers she loved so much, and then, hastening towards her, he stood by her in silence for a few moments, and then he said, in a low voice:

"My darling, now I must know—I must know; don't keep me any longer in suspense."

"Oh, Pen! oh, Pen!" she said, and broke down, so he drew her gently to him,

and for a minute her head rested on his breast, and he softly murmured :

"My own, my darling, don't cry."

Unfortunately Stephen had also hastened to the garden to hear his sentence. He had put away from him Phœbe's insinuations as unworthy of his Pensie; but the poison of his cousin's words had been working silently. He came unheard upon the soft grass; he fancied he saw her blue dress through the shrubs, like a bit of sky that had fluttered to earth, and he made straight for it, just in time to see his darling's head upon another man's breast, and that man his only possible rival, Pen Thornhill. Phœbe was right; Pensie was a flirt, something worse, a heartless woman, a traitor, a—— He rushed away unheard, unseen, and plunging into a shrubbery, made his exit out of the grounds by jumping over a fence. In the distance he saw Phœbe coming towards him, and fled in the opposite direction; he hated her because she had spoken truly, and he hated himself for loving a worthless woman for nothing, and, above all, he hated life.

The beautiful spring sunshine seemed to mock him and his sorrow as he hastened back to the Moat House; every step he took made him more mad with disappointed love; he cursed his fate and his love alternately, having none of Pen's finer element of courage in his nature. When he reached his own door he fancied that everything about it had changed; that the grey walls looked like the home of despair; that the dark rooms were tenanted by evil spirits, who whispered horrible suggestions to him—whispered mockingly that his life was not worth having since a woman had cheated him, betrayed him, and led him on merely to give him pain. Perhaps she had even prepared his punishment beforehand; perhaps she had guessed that he would come and see her with another man's arms round her, another man's lips on hers. Why had woman been created; why had love been implanted into the heart of man? Was it merely that it might kill him?

Stephen paced the library floor up and down, up and down. Life was of no value to him if it might not be lived as he liked, and if all that could make it beautiful was turned to bitter disappointment. Death was infinitely preferable—infinity. He paused at that idea, and a mocking voice seemed to whisper: "Why not have done with it altogether?" Why? He walked slowly upstairs into his bedroom, and going

to a drawer he pulled out a revolver, loaded it, and placed it on a table before him, and remained thus—he never knew how long. Madness is the want of the proportion of the ideas; it is the overmastering passion of a thought; often it is the passion of selfishness; and Stephen Atwater sat in the same place all that spring afternoon, brooding over his wrongs till this kind of madness seized him.

Suddenly there was a knock at the door. He started up, hid the revolver with a newspaper, and then went to the door. It was James, the footman.

"Miss Kempe and Miss Phœbe Kempe have called, sir, and beg to say that they would like to see you for a few minutes."

Stephen stared at the servant as if he could not understand his words; then, with a great effort, he answered:

"Very well, James; show the ladies into the drawing-room."

Strange to say, after a few minutes the young Squire was able to follow James, and though he looked pale and grave, his cousins did not guess the state of mind he was in. The effort was tremendous, but Stephen was not going to let the world know of his wound till all was over.

"Oh, Stevie," said Miss Kempe, "mother wants to know if you will dine with us to-night—only ourselves."

"You must be so dull," added Phœbe; "we wanted to ask Pensie, but she is better engaged, I fancy, from something I saw."

"Indeed! I suppose you mean——"

Stephen could not finish the sentence, but Phœbe was glad to do it for him.

"Yes, indeed, there is no doubt that she and the Captain will make a match of it. I do think she is a flirt of the first water. She has been given to at least three men since last winter. There was Mr. Lloyd, who was madly in love with her."

"But, Phœbe, dear, Pensie can't help if people will admire her."

"Oh, can't she? She makes eyes at all the men. Well, I am sure Mr. Lloyd had a happy escape. I pity the man who marries Pensie."

She looked at Stephen as she said this.

"He won't be the first man who finds a wife a poor bargain," said Stephen, laughing.

"No, but with her the Captain will have no chance of being happy. How happy a nice wife can make a man! Don't

you know, Helen, how happy Fanny and George Smythe are—such a perfect understanding; but then they were sort of cousins, and had known each other always."

"But you will come this evening, won't you, Stevie?" said Helen.

"I am afraid I can't," answered Stephen, slowly, as if each word hurt him; "I have an engagement. I must go—there is a meeting at Coulton which I must attend; another evening I will come."

"Never mind the meeting, dear Stevie," said Phoebe, softly; "do you know that you really do look ill, and to be with us, who so truly appreciate you, will do you a world of good? I am sure it will."

Stephen began to feel furious; he felt that he could almost turn Phoebe out of the house for daring to offer him sympathy; but he also felt that perhaps if he went to dine with the Kempes that evening he might propose to this girl—and repent afterwards.

"No," he said, "I can't come; and if you will excuse me, I must go now, I have some writing to finish."

He got rid of them somehow, then rushed back to his room and to that black thought. It seemed to grow bigger and bigger, till the whole room was filled with its phantom form. Stephen at last rang the bell, and told James that he did not wish to dine that evening, he was not feeling well; but he was to bring him some whisky and biscuits, and that he would go to bed early.

The spring day drew to its close with a soft sigh in the air like that of a weary, tired child; the gentle song of the birds gradually hushed itself; a slight mist rose over the meadows, and clung about the base of the beech-trees near to the Moat House; the moonlight pierced the half-clothed branches, and sent strange shadows to chill the daisies on the grass; but no peace came to the brain of the man whom the spirit of the coward had filled. He had made so sure of Pensie; he loved her so passionately, and he was not to have her.

Then he sat down and began to write a letter to her—a letter dictated by the mad passion which possessed him, but which also now and then showed signs of true love. This letter should make Pensie know what she had done; she should not remain ignorant of the fact that it was her fault, and that his death would be associated for ever with her sin.

He wrote many pages; then he re-read

them, and they seemed but poor attempts at the truth; they did not properly express his thoughts, so he tore up the sheets and began again.

In the midst of the second epistle he paused. There came to him the remembrance of his early life, of his mother, dead long ago. He put down his pen, and some good angel whispered better thoughts to him. But no, Pensie should read that letter; so he sat down again to his painful task, and as he wrote, the black phantom rose again, and again hovered over him, filling every space, urging him on to a mad deed, and offering him peace after it was over—peace and forgetfulness.

Forgetfulness!—but what if there should be none? What if the grave only sharpened memory? The idea made him recoil. He once more rose up and went to the window.

"Pensie, Pensie," he called out, as if she could hear him. "Come to me, my darling. I will forgive you. But no; that man has your love—that man; most likely you are dreaming of him, and he of you. Curse him!"

He flung open the window, and let the cool night air play upon his forehead; then he went to the table, poured out some whisky, and drank it. That did a man good; it braced his nerves; it made him feel a new fire coursing in his veins.

The clock struck twelve.

If the time was come to end his misery, he felt that now he had the courage to accomplish the deed. He began making a few preparations. He fastened the letter, and directed it. He tried to fancy Pensie opening it and reading it. Ah! then she would be sorry! She might repent. Too late! And the words "too late," sent him back into a world of dreams, during which Time disappeared. At last he rose, and once more returned to the window and looked out. The moonlight was so bright, that he could see things quite distinctly a long way off. And as he stood and gazed, it seemed to him that he saw the form of a man in a meadow.

Was it a gamekeeper? No; he knew the outward look of all the men on his estate. This figure had the build of a gentleman. He watched it intently for some time, then a strange feeling of fury seized him. He fancied—but no—was his mind losing its balance?—the figure was running, running as if for life. But suddenly it reached the copse, and disappeared in its shadows.

Stephen stood in the same place spell-bound. He believed he had seen a vision of his enemy—a vision meant to urge him on to the final tragedy. He had seen, or fancied he had seen, his rival.

At last, after a long interval, he turned round suddenly, and seized the revolver just as there sounded through the house the loud, harsh sound of the front-door bell.

Pensie all that day had waited for him, restless, uncertain. She had not really said "Yes" to Pen, she had begged him for a little more time; she loved him, but was it as a brother or as a lover? She was not sure. Pen was too happy to complain; he had felt that she was his; that she must be his because he loved her so truly, so unselfishly, so much more than he loved himself. Pensie bound him down "to say nothing yet to uncle," and Pen rather enjoyed hugging his secret, at least for a day, and Pensie that evening was quite charming, quiet, and pensive, and this mood added seven-fold to her charms.

So Pen fell asleep that night in the happiest frame of mind, a state of bliss which comes but once in a man's lifetime but which he remembers in old age.

Suddenly, however, he seemed to be roused out of his pleasant slumber by a voice close to him—a voice whose words were whispered, and yet which seemed so intensely audible that he started up and hastily struck a match.

The words were, "Go to the Moat House."

He looked round and saw that he was alone. He thought he must have been dreaming—so he laid down again, strangely troubled by the recollection of the intensity of that whisper. Of course it was only a dream, and in ten minutes Pen was dozing again, but again with startling distinctness he heard the words, "Go to the Moat House."

The Captain was not superstitious—he had knocked about the world too much for that—but he could not resist again striking a match and again looking round to see if he were really alone. All was as usual. Hurstmere was a new house, and had no strange corners and no traditional ghost. What could it mean? The words seemed to vibrate through him in a strange and awful manner. He positively dared not lie down again for fear of again hearing that imperative command, so he dressed hastily, determined to see if there were some one outside. This he said to excuse

himself for thus putting on his clothes at midnight. He looked at his watch, it was half-past twelve; he must have been in his first and soundest sleep when that whisper had roused him.

He went to the window, and gazing out saw nothing but the moonlight embracing the earth with her cold arms. He turned away, feeling still more the horror of that whisper. What a fool he would look if it all meant nothing! Then he softly opened the door and walked down the passage, past his uncle's room, past Miss Hilton's door, and then just as he came opposite Pensie's chamber, he was startled by seeing the door quickly open, and still more startled by beholding Pensie herself fully dressed and pale as the pale moonlight, standing in the doorway.

"Oh, Pen," she said, but not in the tone she had used this morning, her voice seemed like a muffled note of funeral music.

"What is the matter?" he said, quickly. "I—I thought you—something was the matter."

"Oh, Pen, I am glad you have come. I've just had a dreadful dream—oh, so dreadful! Go to the Moat House."

Pen started back on hearing the words again.

"What do you mean? Was it you—you, Pensie, who said that?"

"Said what? But never mind, you are dressed. Oh, go—go to Mr. Atwater and tell him—"

"Mr. Atwater, Pensie!" Pen's heart sank within him.

"Oh, Pen, I'm so wicked; it is my fault. He said he would come yesterday, and I should give him his answer. Don't look so, Pen; Stevie loves me, too. I couldn't help it; I—I—I dreamt. Oh, Pen, make haste; go and tell him that—that—anything; but don't let that happen; don't let me have his blood on my head. If you won't go, Pen, I must—I must."

Captain Thornhill had done many brave things in his life, but I think this was the bravest deed he had ever been asked to volunteer for.

"Pensie, of course you cannot go there. I shall go; tell me what to say."

Pensie's beautiful, horror-struck face looked at him beseechingly; and she was silent. At this moment, poor child, she knew she loved Pen best—yes, she loved him best; but, oh, the horror of that dream. If it were true it was her fault, hers—hers. For one moment she flung

her arms round Pen and hid her face on his shoulder.

"Pen, I've been vain, and wicked; but I didn't know—I didn't mean it. Save me, Pen, from that dream, if it is true. Say 'yes,' 'yes.' Oh, Pen! oh, Pen!—but go, go to the Moat House."

The Captain had faced the Zulus' assegais and the spears of the wild Arabs—such things were nothing to this; but courage lives at home as well as in the battlefield, and, without another word, Pen Thornhill rushed away. Should he saddle a horse, or walk? It was two miles by the road, but by taking a short cut through fields and across a copse, he could shorten it by nearly half. It was quicker to walk there than to go to the stables and wake the groom; so, like a hare pursued by dogs, the Captain began to run. He put away all personal thoughts for fear he should fail, for fear he should stop in the race—he doubted that voice no longer now. If it meant anything, and if Pensie's terrible dream was also a warning—let sceptics call it what they like—it all meant that he was running a race for life—the life of his rival—Stephen Atwater's life, but his, Pen Thornhill's death, the death of all his hopes. Was he, as it were, tolling his own knell; was he taking the poison from Stephen's lips in order to drink it himself; or was all this a terrible nightmare, an episode he should forget or laugh at afterwards? Yes, after he, Pen, had married Pensie; after she was his, his. No, he must not think; his duty was to hasten on.

So he ran, on and on, over the moonlit grass, past the familiar landmarks, across the small footbridge, and into the dark copse, with its first mantle of green and its night silence. At last the Moat House was in sight, he was separated from it by a great ditch. Reckless of hindrances, he ran down the steep sides and climbed over a high fence, then crossing the old-fashioned lawn he arrived at the front door. Looking up, he saw, though he knew it must be nearly half-past one, a light in an upper window, and without a moment's pause he seized the bell and pulled it violently. The footman slept downstairs, and hurried out of his bed to answer this which must be certainly a midnight appeal for help. Pen treated him with scant courtesy.

"Which is your master's room? I have an urgent message for him."

"Oh, sir! Oh, Captain Thornhill, what's the matter? The first on the right, at the top of the stairs. Shall I go—?"

"No; don't follow me, I want no one."

He strode upstairs, and turned the handle of the door. It was locked.

"Atwater, open the door at once; I want you. I have a message for you."

Stephen knew the voice. His hand was holding something, and his face was deathly pale, whilst a strange, wild light shone in his eyes. Without a word he opened the door; but his calmness was forced—the calmness of temporary madness.

Pen saw everything at a glance—saw the gleam of hatred in Stephen's eyes—saw the mad passion surging up—the passion of jealousy, of overmastering pain and disappointment. Saw also something else, and he made a dash at the young Squire's right hand.

"Coward! Madman, give me that. What are you doing? Thank Heaven I'm in time."

There was a fierce struggle, for already Atwater's passion had burst its bounds. He thought with devilish pleasure that his rival should witness his death, and for all answer, he deliberately turned the muzzle of his revolver towards his temples. His hand was on the trigger just as the Captain seized his arm, and jerked the weapon upwards. The Captain was stronger, taller than the Squire, and as the revolver went off, the ball lodged, not in Steve's brain, but in Pen's left shoulder. Fortunately, it went clean through, and for the first moment the pain was not overpowering. Pen could still wrench away the revolver with his right hand, and say what he had to say.

"Atwater, listen, man, if you are a man and not a fool. What have you tried to do? Think of Pensie. She sent me—she—she—told me to say—to say 'yes'—'yes.' Do you hear, man? That was her message to you—and you—good heavens! I think this is blood."

But it was Atwater who reeled, Atwater who fainted; and Pen had enough pluck and enough presence of mind to ring the bell, and to keep tight hold of the revolver.

When the men rushed in he tried to laugh.

"I've shot myself by accident. Didn't know the cursed thing was loaded, and—your master has fainted at the sight of blood—my blood, you know. Here, man, staunch it, and you, fellow, run for a doctor, and get some of the womenkind to see after the Squire. Why the deuce do people keep loaded firearms in a bedroom?"

"Master always does," gasped the footman, as he ran off, and on his way he repeated the story as he had heard it.

Men like Pen Thornhill do not die of wounds, they live to get well and to suffer; but he did not have to attend the wedding of the Squire with the beautiful Pensie. Fortune in some respects favoured him. Old Mr. Thornhill died suddenly the week after the accident, and so his nephew, who could not be moved from the Moat House for a month, never returned to his home for many a long year. He became a wanderer on the face of the earth, but a wanderer who always left his mark, and that a good mark, wherever he went. He had to carry about with him a heavy burden of sorrow, but he carried it as a soldier should, without wincing.

And Pensie! Ah, well, Phœbe Kempe rejoiced with an unholy joy because that marriage was not considered by gossips to be a very happy one; no breath of scandal ever approached the Moat House, but the Squire's marriage was not a perfect union—that was all.

"MEASURE FOR MEASURE."

By MRS. LEITH ADAMS
(MRS. R. S. DE COURCY LAFFAN).

PART I. HER DAY.

THEY called him "the boy"—that is, in the regiment.

Of course, it is a very easy thing to put a number or a name to a regiment; but those of us who have ever lived in one well know that the definite article serves all necessary nomenclature. That regiment is "the" regiment. The others—Horse and Foot, Gunners and Sappers—may go by various names and—in the days of which I write—numbers; but "the" is enough for "ours."

Well, then, in "the" regiment, Mostyn Eliot was familiarly known among his comrades as "the boy."

This sobriquet assuredly did not cling to him because of his youthfulness, nor yet because of his position, for he was what his soldier-servant's wife called a "full lieutenant"—a rank not to be found in the Army List, but one which appeared to be looked upon with infinite satisfaction by the good woman in question—and his years were such as might be expected in a

man who looked forward to the chance of purchasing his captaincy shortly.

No, it was neither years nor position that gave Mostyn Eliot the name of "the boy," it was an indescribable breeziness and freshness about his whole personality, a verve and go that characterised all he said and did, a capability of the thorough enjoyment of life and all its healthy pleasures; a straightforwardness so complete that it now and again laid him open to imposture.

People had been heard to say that it "did them good" to see young Eliot; and as to the men of the 193rd, they would, as the saying is, have gone through fire and water for him. He had such a kindly way with him! He would stoop down to speak to some diminutive child, sobbing outside the married quarters, and try hard to understand the baby language that lisped out the story of a trouble that cost so many tears. If a poor woman of the company to which he belonged were ill, Lieutenant Eliot was sure to remember to ask her husband how she was. Sometimes his sympathy took a more substantial form; but he had little beyond his pay to live on, and could not be as generous as he would. If some silly ensign, top-heavy with a sense of his own importance, began to get into deep waters and social quagmires, many times and oft was Eliot's hand outstretched to drag him on to dry land, set him on his feet, and keep an eye upon him until he was more—what I once heard an old soldier call—"used to himself"—that is, himself in a uniform, and without his family about him to look after him.

Then what a gift of humour Eliot possessed! You might have told his place at the mess-table with your eyes shut. There was generally a ripple of laughter playing about him, and even the Colonel—rather a gaunt and grim specimen of a C.O.—had been known to let off a sudden guffaw—like the firing of a gun, and almost as short and sudden—at some of his sayings and doings.

But with all these bright and gentle characteristics, there was another side to Mostyn Eliot's personality, which was—it must be confessed—somewhat startling to you when first you came across it. This was a sudden, severe, almost implacable austerity, which certain kinds of evil-doing brought out in him, as heat brings out colour. The bright, debonair face would grow like marble; the lips, made

for smiles and kindly words, would set in a relentless line; the very voice of the man would change. The men knew this phase of the Lieutenant, and feared it; his brother officers—that is to say, one or two of them, had also made acquaintance with it. On more than one occasion some youngster, who had lost more money at cards than he could well pay, had found a willing banker in Mostyn Eliot; but, a sporting Captain of the regiment having tried the process called "plucking a pigeon," thought he had perhaps best not repeat the experiment, that is, he thought so after an interview with "the boy." Other youngsters, in still more compromising situations, found a friend in our hero; but a certain weak-kneed young idiot, having given the name of a brother officer to mask his own misdoings, and escape their consequences, wished he had never been born—or born with a more manly courage, and better sense of rectitude—as Mostyn Eliot passed him by with a nod which it would have required a magnifying-glass to detect, and was apparently quite unconscious of his presence in the ante-room, or at mess, only recognising him when in his official capacity that recognition became a necessity. The sternness of a person usually genial and sympathetic is bitter, and cuts deep. In the case of Mostyn Eliot it had also all the force that ever attends the unexpected.

It will be seen by all this the kind of reputation Mostyn Eliot had in the 193rd, and the estimation in which he was held.

It so happened that the regiment had been in for a long spell of home-service, and very pleasant soldiering had Mostyn Eliot found it, though at times he longed for something more stirring, longed to "smell gunpowder," and experience the sensation of being "under fire." Soldiering in the northern capital of Ireland, with its brilliant little court, its Castle balls, its starry-eyed women and genial men; in the South with its hunting and fishing, its lovely climate, and delightful—though somewhat ramshackle—old country mansions, where the welcome never failed you, and the smile and the jest were like sunshine ever playing—all these things, and many more akin to them, were charming; but the heart of our young soldier yearned for a more adventurous life, and for a chance of winning distinction, of showing the grit that was in him.

In some sort, it appeared likely that these ideas of his might be fulfilled, for orders

for Indian service reached the 193rd, and all was bustle, excitement, and chatter. A rookery in its busiest spring moments would hardly have compared with the mess for noise and disputation the night of the day on which this news had arrived. To the young and hopeful it was welcome indeed. The iron Colonel spoke few words and gave no indication as to the state of his mind on the subject of the move, save a curtly worded hope that his officers would not overburden themselves with baggage, and a muttered assertion that in his young days a toothbrush and a pocket-handkerchief were "about it;" but that, nowadays, the service was going to the dogs, and a man couldn't set out without a pack of patent chairs and "Heaven knows what."

To the men married without leave this news was the knell of doom, and women's tears poured forth like rain, while the little ones wondered why mother was crying, and why daddy held them so tight as they clambered on his knees and fingered the bright buttons on his tunic.

There were other sad hearts in the regiment. Ensign Grimper—a very young warrior indeed—desperately in love with a widow fourteen years older than himself, rushed off in the heat of the moment and proposed; returning crushed, not only by the lady's kind, but firm refusal, but also because she had commenced it thus: "My dear boy." She had also got very red in the face, and he had seen the tears start to her eyes; but he had hideous misgivings that these marks of agitation were the signs of repressed laughter and astonishment, rather than of any softer emotion. Ensign Grimper was not in a frame of mind to accept the "previous-to-embarkation leave" that now set in. He button-holed fellows in the ante-room all day long.

"My dear fellow," he would say, "do you think she was laughing at me?" They were sure she was; but they soothed him as best they could, and did not even smile when he said he "trusted he should find a grave in the burning East."

Mostyn Eliot was one of the first to start on six weeks' leave of absence. His mother—long widowed—was staying with her brother, General Le Gyte, at his old country house in the heart of the green Midlands. Thither our hero sped, light at heart, glad in the prospect that lay before him, pondering on the possibilities of big game in the Himalayas, tiger-shooting in the jungle, of everything around him new and strange, full of interest to the eye.

The dog-cart met Mr. Eliot at the station, and the ancient servitor who drove it apologised for the General's absence by mentioning that "it" had got him again in the left foot; "it" standing for the gout, an enemy the old soldier had found more redoubtable than any faced in battle.

The lovely spring of 1857 was breaking on the world, carpeting the woods with heaven-blue hyacinths, dotting the meadows with golden daffodils, scenting the air with the perfume of new-blown violets. The birds, not yet in full song, carolled in snatches of joyful melody: the fitful overture to the fuller choir to come. How fresh and fair the world seemed as Mostyn Eliot passed rapidly by mead and stream, by groves of larch all hung with emerald tassels, and beeches ruddy with a myriad bursting buds!

Then the village, near which lay the old Manor House, gained, there came into sight the Rectory. Such a dear old place as it was, with its red gables, and clematis-hung walls, its pathway leading to the lych-gate of the churchyard, and its ancient yew-tree on the bit of a lawn that it looked so much too big for!

Mostyn had had many a pleasant day at the Manor House, and was glad to see these landmarks again. But what was this new and charming feature in the landscape? A girl, tall and slender, with a beautiful, dark face, and dreamy eyes—a girl leaning on the Rectory gate, swinging a large black Spanish hat in her hand, and lazily regarding the passers-by!

The groom touched his hat; the girl gave a tiny nod, flashing a quick, all-taking-in look at the stranger as she did so.

"Who is the lady, Gerningham?" said Mostyn, ashamed to be conscious of an almost irresistible desire to turn round and look at her once again. "Surely she is a stranger in these parts?"

"Well, sir, it's this way—she is, and she isn't. She's niece to the Rev. Damien, and come from foreign parts to keep house for him, so they say. He's bin a very lonely old man, sir, since Master Fred took to bad ways, has the Rev. Damien; and, maybe, it's well for him to have something young and pleasant-like anigh him to cheer him up. Miss Clarice, sir, they call her. But you'll know all about her better than me afore many hours be past, for the Reverend and her be dining up at the Manor to-night, so Simpkins told me, and other quality beside."

Know all about her? Why, before mid-

night it seemed to Mostyn Eliot as if he had known her all his life, since life must have been quite an empty sort of thing, not worth the mentioning, until he did know her.

One long glance into those deep, soft eyes, one long drinking-in of the mellow tones of her low, sweet voice, and . . . the deed was done.

Some men walk into love; some saunter into love; some fall into love; Lieutenant Eliot of the 193rd plunged into love! Neither did he hide this burning light of love under a bushel. He spent every possible hour of every possible day by the side of Clarice Damien. He told her of all his hopes and ambitions for the future; of his regiment, his men, his ideas on many abstruse subjects connected with the Service—with a big S. He was not a man to treat a woman as a toy or a doll. Her beauty drew him to her, her charm conquered him; but he craved for a share of her heart and her mind; he wanted her to enter into his life as he would fain do into hers. The old Rector, busy delving among Greek roots, or straining every nerve to scrape together what money he could to send to his scapegrace son—who was always in extremity for lack of coin of the realm, and had once represented himself dying in order to extort an extra contribution—saw nothing of the drama that was being enacted under his reverend nose. Mrs. Eliot saw it clearly enough; and, holding love to be a very sacred thing indeed, did not see fit to interfere, though she knew Clarice to be penniless, and Mostyn dependent on his pay, and with little or no prospect of ever being anything else, until her own death should give him something like two hundred a year. She had loved and married his father, and they had been very happy together, though always poor enough; so happy, that when her husband died, the light died out of her life for ever, save for the boy with the father's eyes and his bonnie curly hair. The old General saw it, and frowned; he was of opinion that any man who married young made a distinct fool of himself. Had not Mostyn himself told him of a young fellow called Musters—a promising spark, a skilled surgeon and right good sort—belonging to the 193rd, who went and married a woman with a head like a bull-frog and a tongue like the clapper of a bell, and was spoken of as "poor old Musters" ever after by his brother officers?

In common with many other people he was slightly afraid of his nephew, or he would have expressed his opinions openly, and alluded to the case of Musters. His worldly-minded wife, on the contrary, encouraged young Eliot's infatuation—pour cause. Had she not an eldest son—one Blazebrook Le Gyte, now ten years a widower, rich in his own right, as well as prospectively, as heir of the Manor House and lands? True, he did not bear a very savoury reputation up in town; but he was looked upon as a parti, and Mrs. Le Gyte had no notion of him playing King Cophetua to the beggar maiden, Clarice Damien. At one time the constant visits of this delectable being to the Rectory had alarmed her. The Rector's niece was, therefore, better out of the way. And what of the girl herself?

There are people in the world—women and men too—who are like cats; they like warmth and comfort, and purr, or go as near to that process as their human organisation will allow them, when they find themselves surrounded by luxury, wealth, and ease. To Clarice the Manor House was a sort of Paradise. Mr. Damien was poor, very poor. Not only was the living of Deepdene a poor one, but a constant drain sapped its limited resources. That terrible "Master Fred," of whom we have heard Gerningham speak, was a sort of quicksand that swallowed up everything. The simple, nay, often pinched fare, the constant efforts after economy in little things—how the girl hated it all! Yet she was not wholly ungrateful, nor yet wholly unloving; only she pitied herself, and was never so happy as when, with her natty little shoes in a neat parcel, and her best gown covered with a long waterproof cloak, she betook herself to the Manor to see "dear Mrs. Le Gyte." It is more than probable the girl would herself have been shocked if she could have realised how much the dainty food, the sensuous beauty and comfort of the noble old rooms, had to say to this affection of hers for the Le Gytes. The swinging lamps, the delicate appointments of the table, the lovely dresses of the ladies—what a contrast it all was to the barrenness of the Rectory parlour, with the shabby old Rector digging among his Greek roots by the light of a single candle!

Be it said, however, at this stage of our story, that in the days now to come, Clarice was not without the touch and fire of a real and exalted passion. The faulty

can no more escape the power of love than the wholly estimable, and it is as real in the one case as the other. If Mostyn Eliot might have said with Orlando, "What passion hangs these weights upon my tongue? I cannot speak to her"—so much did his usual glibness and bonhomie fail him in the presence of the woman he loved—Clarice, too, was not untouched by the divine reality of love. Little genuine thrills of happiness—trembling sighs of deep content—these were not unknown to her, and when her lover's lips clung to hers in the first sweet kiss of betrothal, and her heart beat against his, she could have vowed a fealty which should never fail. She had her "day"; her little heaven below, an experience that was destined to leave its indelible mark upon all her future life. But Clarice was like the cat that loves the warmth and comfort, and purrs when it is pleased. Mostyn—her grand young lover—was dear—very, very dear; the thought of parting with him ran through her heart like a knife. He was tender, loyal, brave—a lover to be proud of truly; but, if only in addition to all these fine qualities he had been as rich as—as Blazebrook Le Gyte, for instance! Fancy owning the dear old Manor House, being able to walk through the grand oak-panelled rooms and think they were one's very own; besides all that, fancy having a house in Park Lane, the best and most fashionable part of London, so Clarice was told, and a husband who belonged to the Four-in-hand Club! These were dazzling visions. They only visited the dusky tress-crowned head when Mostyn was not by to charm them away; but they were there, deep down, like some buried, poisonous root destined to bear bitter and acrid fruit.

When the parting came, what a wrench it was! Clarice, lying back in her lover's arms—feeling his tears upon her face—felt that indeed this severance was as the bitterness of death itself. Half unconscious, she still knew that he laid her gently and tenderly upon a couch, heard his smothered—

"God keep you, my darling, till we meet again—" heard in a strange, muffled way, as of a sound far distant, the clang of the Rectory door, knew that the ordeal was past, and her lover gone. . . . The violets were in blossom then. Mostyn crushed some of their delicate blossoms as he rushed across the lawn, away, away, from the dearest thing he had in the world.

Before the roses were in bloom against the Rectory walls, a horrible thick darkness was brooding over the length and breadth of the land. Men's hearts failed them for fear. Women's eyes were wept blind and dim, sorrowing with unspeakable anguish for their loved ones.

Who amongst us can forget the news of the Indian Mutiny—the horror of slain men, butchered women and little ones, the cry of whose blood went up to heaven from the ground?

Those boy-ensigns, fresh from Addiscombe, slain in cold blood, cut off in the brightness of their youth! What English mother but mourned them as her own?

One line only reached Clarice from Mostyn Eliot:

"The regiment is off to Gwalior to Sir Hugh Rose. I am writing this on a drum-head, to seize a possible chance of sending it to England. The knowledge that you hold me in your thoughts and prayers is my best shield and buckler in these terrible days—my darling!"

When Clarice got this pitiful little letter, she kissed it madly, let her tears fall upon it like rain, pressed it to her bosom—the bosom that heaved with rending sighs and sobs—and then she burnt it slowly and deliberately in the flame of a perfumed spirit-lamp that stood on a little table by her side.

She could hardly do less than burn Mostyn Eliot's letter, for—when it reached her, she was in her dainty boudoir in the house in Park Lane—she was Blazebrook Le Gyte's wife.

PART II. HIS DAY.

OUR story takes a leap forward—a leap of ten years.

We are in Malta now—Byron's "little military hothouse"—and Malta is looking very beautiful, anyway, with its deep purple waters, star-gemmed by the head-lights of countless "dysos," and canopied by a sky as purple and as brightly gemmed; sweet with the breath of orange-blossoms and lemon-bloom; musical with the fitful harmonies of boatman's song, lightly-touched mandoline, and in the Strada Reale, opposite the main guard, by the subdued but inspiring strains of a band. All 'over the island bugle has answered bugle, as each regiment, lying in the different lines, has called its wanderers home; the bells of the many churches have ceased to clang, for that day, at least.

Lights glimmer in the overhanging balconies of the houses—houses gay with coloured draperies and hanging plants, which now look grey and ghostly in the flickering light. Carriages are rattling along the busy street, and the starlight glints on glittering uniforms and ladies gaily dight. It is a perfect kaleidoscope of changing colour, and it melts and sways, parts and joins company again in true kaleidoscope fashion. Then it concentrates itself at the Palace gate, and so winds out of sight, up the noble flight of spotless marble stairs.

All this means that His Excellency the Governor gives a ball to-night, and that all Malta who is anybody is there. A Royal Princess, fair and beautiful to look upon as a May morning, is the chief guest of the evening.

As we enter the grand sweep of rooms running parallel to the gallery which is lined with glittering suits of armour, she may be seen at the end of the vista, bending with that marvellous mingling of gentleness and dignity for which she is famous, in acknowledgement of the profound salute of an officer in Line uniform, who is in the act of being presented to her by the Governor himself. There are far more brilliant uniforms in those dazzling rooms than that worn by the man thus honoured, but few breasts carry such a blaze of medals as his; and there, amid the lesser lights, shines the Cross that is coveted of all.

It is ten years since we saw Mostyn Eliot, now commanding the 193rd Regiment of Foot. Let us note what changes time has wrought.

The tawny locks are as crisp and close-cropped as ever; but above the temples they glisten with silver threads, and the face—the dear, true face which we last saw blurred with tears, and bending over the pale brow of Clarice Damien, is scarred down one cheek with an ugly seam, and scarred—ah, Heaven! how much more deeply with lines that tell of suffering sternly borne, of loss of faith in a woman's purity and truth, of a stormy life which has left the clear, bright, boyish days of yore far behind.

And this is a woman's work. Clarice had her "day," and this is what she did with it.

There was a dark-eyed, straight-looking boy, fresh from Addiscombe, who went out with the 193rd to India. His name was Hugh Dennison, and Mostyn

Eliot "took him up" not a little. It was this youngster who, in the dreadful days of the Mutiny, chanced to see in a stray newspaper the marriage of Clarice Damien to Blazebrook Le Gyte. The cry he uttered brought Mostyn Eliot to his side.

For days the man went about with a fixed staring look in his eyes that boded no good to any who crossed his path. He was seen to cut down fourteen rebel Sepoys in quick rotation, men who were hiding to fire from their ambush upon the English. It may be said that in a certain way Clarice won him the Victoria Cross. His life had so little value in his eyes that he was absolutely reckless; yet bore—so said those about him—a charm in his breast that made Death glance aside. Those days seem long past now. Ten years may be longer than a lifetime.

After a few gracious words from the Princess, Colonel Eliot passed on with a second profound salutation, to make way for others. His tall stature and fine proportions made him a notable figure even in that brilliant gathering, wherein "fair women and brave men" mingled in motley groups or swayed in the mazes of the dance.

He paced slowly towards the long gallery, glancing with a smile at our old friend, once Lieutenant, now Captain Grimper, over head and ears in a flirtation with a comely damsel, in a wonderful gown of white and rose. That aspiring being had not found a grave in the burning East, and had got over the blight of the refusal of ten years ago. Colonel Eliot lingered a moment by Mrs. Musters' chair, to that obese lady's radiant and evident delight; but was far too wary to bring himself to an anchor on the neighbouring lounge she obligingly indicated. He knew her "tricks and her manners" too well. Slowly sauntering onwards he met his closest friends, Major and Mrs. Delacombe of the Engineers, the lady, as usual, faultlessly attired, also—as usual—radiantly happy, and flirting—as usual again—with her own husband, instead of with somebody else's, as was, it must be confessed, somewhat the fashion.

"Adamantine man!" she said, laughing, as she held out her slim and daintily-gloved hand, "have you seen the beautiful widow about whom the whole garrison is raving?"

"You know I have been shooting in Catania," he answered, laughing, too; "there are no bewitching widows there."

"You would not tell us if there were," replied the merry lady, tapping him on the arm with her plumed fan; "but, seriously, Colonel Eliot—Mostyn—if you do not capitulate, if that stony heart of yours is not touched when you see——"

Even as she spoke, the whole face of the man she was addressing changed, and she caught her breath and clutched her husband's arm, keeping a pained and amazed silence.

Coming down the corridor, sweeping along between the serried ranks of knightless armour, her long silken skirts trailing on the polished floor, Mostyn Eliot once more saw Clarice Le Gyte—the woman who had betrayed him; the woman who had shamelessly sold herself for wealth and luxury, loving him, as well he knew, all the time.

Mrs. Delacombe, glancing wildly from the one to the other, saw Mrs. Le Gyte stand as suddenly still as though some one had struck her in the face; saw every vestige of colour fade from cheek and lip; saw a hunted, fearsome look dawn in the great, dark eyes that were fixed on Mostyn Eliot's face.

"Ah, Eliot," said the Governor's military secretary, who was the beautiful widow's escort, "glad to see you back again." Then, with a courteous bend towards the lady on his arm, "Mrs. Le Gyte, may I present to you my friend, Colonel Mostyn Eliot?"

She was white as death; but she had got herself in hand again. As the Colonel of the 193rd bowed low, she, too, bent with the easy, willowy grace he so well—so well remembered. How beautiful she was, in her perfectly fitting robe of black silk and lace, with diamond stars shimmering in her hair, and gleaming on her white bosom! One would have thought her loveliness, the stricken, pleading glance of her sad eyes, might have softened any man's heart. But men had never even remembered for years back that Mostyn Eliot had once been called "the boy." The brightness of the old days had died long since, killed by a woman's hand; and we can remember there was a stern side to our hero's character even then.

"I hardly need to be presented to Mrs. Le Gyte," he said, speaking very slowly and distinctly, "we are quite old friends—cousins by marriage, in fact. It is only a strange fate that has kept us apart so long."

Mrs. Delacombe had been hurried away by her husband, who was afraid she might

make matters worse by betraying surprise and agitation. The Governor's A.D.C. came up to summon the secretary to his Excellency's side.

These two so strangely met, so long parted, were left in that solitude a crowd makes so complete.

"Permit me," said Mostyn Eliot, and once again the hand of Clarice touched his arm.

He felt her shiver at the contact. Maybe he would not have cared to confess how his own heart leapt and throbbed. He was angry with his own eyes for finding her so fair; it maddened him to remember that the diamonds that sparkled on her breast and amid the little tendrils of her hair, must have been bought with—Blazebrook Le Gyte's money. A muttered curse rose to his lips, and had to be bitten back.

They paced the long gallery slowly up and down. It was his "day" now, and oh! how pitiless he was!

Ignoring all the past as though it had never been, he made himself courteous and charming as to a perfect stranger whose acquaintance he had just made. He spoke of the climate, the news of the Garrison, a field day about to come off, which he advised her to make a point of seeing. By not so much as one word did he allude to the past; by not so much as one veiled expression did he show that, for him, memory had one living impulse left. He told her many interesting facts about the Palace itself; asked her if she had seen "guard-mounting" in the Square opposite, and, if not, would she like to do so? He pointed out to her Mrs. Carbonel, wife of Captain Carbonel of his regiment, and said she was considered "a very pretty woman." Was she not indeed looking charming to-night? He, Mostyn Eliot, really felt quite proud of her.

Slower and more and more heavily came the tortured creature's breath. At last she could only reply in monosyllables, panting as she spoke. At this her companion put on an air of gentle surprise.

"Surely," he said, with a mocking gleam in his eyes, and a smile that was not good to see upon his lips, "you are ill? The heat of the room overcomes you. Let me find your friends. You are not here alone?"

"You are cruel—cruel," she murmured, with shaking lips.

"It is a lesson I learnt from you."

There was no sleep for Mostyn Eliot

that night; indeed, when he got home from the Palace, there was not much night left to sleep through; but, of such as there was he took no account. Off with his gold-braided tunic, on with a loose smoking jacket, then, an hour or two of restless pacing up and down his room which looked out into a garden of sweet flowers on one side, and down the glacis to Calcare Gate at the other. Surely, he thought, this conflict will cease when the sounds of a new day awake about me, and life begins again? The light grew, the sound of the sentry being changed at Fort Ricasoli came faintly over the quiet water; one, two, three steps, rattle of arms presented; one, two, three again.

How still was the breaking of the day! What wondrous rainbow colours touched and gemmed the pale surface of the sea! Bah! what good was it to babble to himself like that of earth and sky when all the while the undercurrent of his thoughts was one wild turmoil of tossing thought, centred about Clarice Le Gyte? How her beauty haunted him! The girl of twenty-three, lithe, softly dark, had given, after all, but faint promise of the ripe, rich rose of loveliness that was still to come. And more than this, more than her beauty, was the spell upon him of the passion-laden eyes, the exquisite intensity of the love-light to be read in them, as they rested on his own.

"She has thought of me all the years," he muttered, and shivered from head to heel at the thought. Still, she had sinned, she must suffer. She had had her day—this was his. He was no weakling to fall at the feet of the woman who had once betrayed him—not he!

As the day wore on the Colonel spread dismay among the "youngsters" by his grave, set face at the orderly-room; while defaulters shook in their ill-fitting shoes.

Later in the day it was easy for Mostyn Eliot to procure as much information as he craved for as to "the beautiful widow." She was staying in Strada Stretta, together with a Mr. and Mrs. Daventry, who had brought letters of introduction to the Governor and the Admiral, and whose yacht, the "Bonnie Bluebelle," lay in Grand Harbour. She had only been in the island a few days, but quite long enough to set the place in a blaze. All day long some gossip or other about her came to the Colonel's ears. And his feet seemed made of lead, so heavy were they, as they bore him away from the neighbourhood of the

Strada Stretta; and winged like the feet of Apollo as he neared that same locality. He said to himself: "She will not expect me, after the way I behaved last night, after the brute I made of myself." Then a voice in his heart whispered: "She will long for you—she will be ready to forgive—if you will."

Glad was Mostyn Eliot when the bright sunny day declined, and victory over self was still his. The "Bonnie Bluebelle" was to sail shortly. Perhaps he should never, never see Clarice again. . . .

He was dining with one of the ancient noblesse of the Maltese aristocracy, and, when fitly caparisoned, started forth. He was distraught and unlike himself all the evening, returning earlier than usual to his quarters. In the simple manner that obtains in tropical climes, the doors of his house stood wide open. His soldier-servant had gone to bed. How silent it all was, and how grey and ghostly looked the flowers in the garden—not a blossom stirring in the windless night! Stars above in the sky, stars—wandering ones—below on the sea, the tinkle of a bell, as a goat, grazing on the glacis, shook its ragged head.

A moment he stood in the doorway. She would think him mad, of course, at that late hour; but, how he longed to go to her; how the "spirit in his feet" moved him to cross the cornstores, and betake himself to Strada Stretta! With an impatient gesture he turned into the silent house, and up the broad stone stairs. Tatties hung over the doorway, and, as he pushed aside the one that belonged to his sitting-room, he was conscious of a figure standing by the window at the upper end.

It was a woman in a "faldette"—that graceful Maltese mantle that completely conceals the face, and falls over the shoulders. Colonel Eliot was in no humour for an adventure of gallantry, or if the intruder was some Maltese woman intent upon "permission" to marry a soldier, why the deuce had she chosen such an unearthly hour to make her appeal? He flung his cigarette out of the near window, laid his forage-cap on the table, and advanced towards the unknown.

The faldette fell back; a gracious and beautiful head was revealed.

"Mostyn, it is I—Clarice."

"Madam," said the man thus addressed, "you have wandered into my rooms by mistake. I deplore the careless-

ness of my servant, who ought to have been better on guard. Permit me to escort you to your friends, who are doubtless troubled by your absence."

"Mostyn, Mostyn, have pity! I have come to ask of you forgiveness. Do not speak to me like that; you break my heart, you kill me! See, say if I do not love you! I have risked all a woman holds dear."

"What does a woman, such as you, hold dear? Her faith? No! Her honour? Surely not. You—sold—yours."

If every word had been a blow stinging her across the face, she could not have cowered and winced more pitifully.

As he uttered each cruel and cutting reproach, he had moved a step nearer to her. They were within half a yard of each other now—pale face opposite pale face. They stood stammering and staring. Oh, the pity of it—they who had loved so fondly in the dear, dead past!

"Do you know that you murdered my life?" hissed Mostyn Eliot, through his teeth.

She stretched out her arms in an ineffable gesture of despair.

"It is the old, terrible law," she moaned, "the old, pitiless justice—a life for a life. You are killing my life now——"

"What did you come here for?" he said, hurling the words at her as though they were stones to slay her.

"There was no other way; the yacht sails to-morrow. We have dined at the Palace. My friends are gone on to a reception. I said I was ill; they will not miss me. Do not be so angry with me; I could not help it. Oh, Mostyn, Mostyn! have some pity on me. I have loved you all through the years—day by day, hour by hour—of all that miserable life of hateful bondage. I grew to love the memory of you as you had been to me in the dear old days. Heaven only—and no other—knows what I lived through. When they told me my husband was dead, I covered my face with my hands. They thought I was weeping; but, Mostyn, think what a woman must have suffered for it to come to that!—I was afraid that I should laugh out loud. Can you not find one little corner in your heart that will soften to me? Only say that you forgive me? Give me back one sweet moment of the dear old days. My life has been so barren and so joyless since we parted. Hold me in your arms for one short instant; kiss me once; give me back the

womanhood that has died out of me, and then I will go my way . . . content."

Never once had his eyes left her face as she thus pleaded—his eyes that burned like living fires. His very lips showed white under the sweep of his moustache; his hands rested on the table by which he stood, and it shook with the tremor and the pressure of them.

She came close up to his side. The faldette fell from her shoulders. The lovely, pallid face, down which the tears were coursing, was raised to his in mute, yet passionate, supplication.

Suddenly the tears gathered in his eyes too, as though called forth in answer to hers. His face changed, quivered, softened.

"And you have loved me like this, all through the years, you love me like this, still——"

"I love you like this . . . still . . . I shall love you like this . . . always—say, Mostyn, do I not deserve in return for such a love . . . forgiveness? . . . It is all I ask."

He had turned away from her; and, with folded arms, and head erect, was gazing out across the moonlit glacia; yet saw nothing but a blurred radiance, by reason of a mist of tears.

"When you spoke to me as you did last night—each word cut through my heart like a knife. Yet, you see, I did not wince. . . . I have taken my punishment—it was well deserved—but it is over now, is it not . . . Mostyn? We may part . . . friends?"

For all answer he turned and caught her in his arms, strained her to his breast, covered her face with passionate, fond kisses; called her "little sweetheart," as he had done in the dear, sweet days of old.

She had had her day—he had had his—and now, this was their day. . . . A little later, a woman, wholly concealed by a Maltese faldette, might have been seen taking her way quietly towards the town, while, at a long distance behind her, strolled an English officer, in mess uniform, meditatively smoking a cigarette.

As the woman passed into the shadow of the Reale Gate, the other stood a moment still, then swept off his forage-cap, and turned homewards, swinging it gently by his side. Mostyn Eliot was too happy, just then, to walk beneath the star-gemmed canopy of heaven otherwise than bare-headed.

The "Bonnie Bluebelle" did not sail the

next morning, and the garrison was electrified by a report that the Colonel of the 193rd was engaged to the beautiful widow. The military secretary looked grave; the P.M.O. assured his friends at the club that he had never seen any reason yet to modify his opinion that men in the Service were best unmarried—at which the surgeon of the Rifle Brigade laughed, and had to explain that he was tickled by the remembrance of a clever thing a man had said to him the day before. People in general were amazed; but, by degrees, a whisper wandered here and there like a gentle breeze among a bed of flowers, and this was what it said:

"On revient toujours à ses premières amours."

REDMAYNE'S WIFE.

By T. W. SPEIGHT.

CHAPTER I.

It would be impossible for me to express in anything like reasonable terms the astonishment, not to speak of a much stronger feeling, with which I one day received the news that Philip Redmayne, who had left home ostensibly for a week's holiday, had brought a wife back with him. Naturally enough, I at first pooh-poohed the news as being the invention of some one who had a grudge against him, or was minded to make him the victim of a foolish joke; but a few hours later the news was confirmed in a way which left me no room for doubt. The wary bachelor of thirty, who had been unsuccessfully angled for by so many mammas with marriageable daughters, had been caught at last. Phil Redmayne was really and truly a married man!

I was his godfather, and had been his guardian till he came of age, and I had always felt as much regard for the boy as if he had been my own son. Not, mind you, that there was any likelihood of my ever having a son of my own, for I had definitively abjured matrimony and all its snares ever since that day, thirty years before, when Matilda Jane——

But that is not to the purpose of my narrative.

Here I may take the opportunity of introducing myself more specifically to the reader's notice. My name, then, is Josiah Crocker, of the firm of Crocker and Wibaby, brewers, Tidsthorpe, Dissex.

It was to Tidsthorpe that my godson came on his arrival at man's estate, and when he had served his time in the office of the land surveyor to whom, at his own request, he had been articled. It was then that I had the pleasure of handing over to him certain coupons of the value of nine thousand pounds, for to that amount had his inheritance grown through careful husbandry on my part during the years of his minority.

Before Phil was many months older he had set up in business at Tidsthorpe on his own account as land surveyor, estate agent, and I know not what besides, for he was eminently of a speculative turn of mind, and by no means disposed to confine himself to the strict lines of the profession to which he had been brought up. He took to the buying and selling of house property, and opened a wharf at the new railway station, with a patent apparatus of his own invention for screening coal. Then he contracted an interest in more than one of the schooners engaged in the coasting trade between the neighbouring town of Perrybeach and sundry other ports. A little later he became proprietor of the Haredale limekilns, situated about three miles from Tidsthorpe, which had proved a disastrous speculation to their previous owner, who was glad to get rid of them at any price.

No thought of taking to himself a wife seemed ever to enter Phil's mind; and I could not but applaud his good sense in copying the example of his godfather in the way of keeping himself aloof from all feminine entanglements. All the harder, therefore, to bear was the blow when it did fall.

But when Phil brought his wife to see me—which he did on the day following their arrival at home—I almost found in my heart to forgive him his folly. She was so sweetly pretty, so fresh, so innocent-looking, so charming in every way that, had I been thirty years younger, and had the chance been put in my way, I would not have answered for the strength of my resolves never to venture into the pitfall of matrimony.

Her manner was child-like and caressing, and she spoke with just enough suspicion of a foreign accent to lend an added piquancy to all she said. Her name was Mimi—Mimi Duclos it had been before her marriage. Her father, a Frenchman, had married an English girl, and she had been brought up partly in the country of one parent, and partly in that of the other.

In any case, Mrs. Phil was a charming little body—one could scarcely think of her as a full-grown woman—and much might be forgiven the man who had chosen to fling behind him the freedom and pleasures of bachelorhood for the sake of her bonny blue eyes.

Up to the time of his marriage Phil had been content to live the life of a bachelor in lodgings; now, however, it was only to be expected that he and his wife would want a house of their own. Still, it was a matter of surprise, not to me only, but to the town generally, when it became known that Phil had decided to set up house-keeping at Needwood Lodge, an old-fashioned country mansion which stood in its own grounds a mile or more away on the London Road. It was true the place was his own, he having bought the lease of it, a bargain, a couple of years before, since which time it had been without a tenant. But it was a big, rambling house, roomy enough to accommodate not merely a large family, but a numerous staff of domestics, and to keep it up in anything like proper style would necessitate an income considerably larger than anybody imagined Phil Redmayne to be in receipt of. I did not fail to remonstrate with him the first time I saw him after the report reached my ears; but he only laughed in his pleasant, easy-going way, and said:

"I thought that by this time, godfather, you gave me credit for knowing my way about. Is it not more sensible to live under my own roof, rather than pay rent elsewhere, with the added risk of the Lodge remaining for an indefinite time without a tenant? And as for 'keeping it up,' I shall do that in a very humble sort of way, you may be sure. Besides, it is just possible that my balance at the bank is bigger than you have a notion of, and I may whisper in your ear that Mimi herself will have a tidy lump of money when she comes of age."

I was glad to hear the latter fact, and it also pleased me to learn that he had been prudent enough, immediately after marriage, to insure his life for five thousand pounds. As time went on, however, I found that Phil's notion of keeping up the Lodge "in a humble sort of way" differed very materially from mine. In the first place, the house was put into what is, I believe, called "thorough decorative repair," the bill for doing which must have amounted to a pretty penny; while half-a-dozen men were hard

at work doing the same by the gardens and shrubberies. Then somebody came down from London with a pocket-book and a measuring-tape, and a week or two later one van-load of furniture after another arrived by railway, till the Lodge would hold no more. A little later came the house-warming, an event which was talked of in Tidsthorpe for many a day to come. Not every one to whom an invitation had been sent honoured the Lodge with his or her presence on the occasion; but for all that, pretty Mrs. Redmayne, in her bridal costume, was the radiant centre of a throng of people such as had never before been brought together in our little town.

Before long the young wife might be met driving about the town and neighbourhood in a brand-new victoria, which, together with a pair of matched ponies, had been her husband's birthday gift. And now a week never went by without at least one dinner party or dance at the Lodge; and, as a natural consequence of such profuse hospitality, when Mr. and Mrs. Redmayne were not entertaining visitors themselves, few evenings passed on which they omitted to return the compliment by visiting elsewhere.

CHAPTER II.

WHEN Philip Redmayne's married life was about a year and a half old, I, who had scarcely known what it was to have a day's illness, was suddenly laid by the heels. As soon as I was well enough to travel, I was ordered off to one of the German spas, and told that I must on no account think of business for at least six months to come. My sister Charlotte—like me, too sensible to marry—who had nursed me through my illness, accompanied me abroad. Phil and his wife came to the station to see us off. Mimi had hardly let a day pass during my illness without calling to enquire how I was; but that dragon of a Charlotte, who had taken an unaccountable dislike to her, would never allow her to come near me, although, as Phil told me afterwards, Mimi had implored her more than once, with tears in her eyes, to be allowed to relieve her for an hour or two now and then in her attendance at my bedside. That day, as she took leave of me, and held up her mouth to be kissed, it was plain that her April-blue eyes were not so bright as they usually were, and there was a little break in her voice as she wished me good-bye,

and laid her commands on me to get well and come back home as speedily as possible. It comforted me somewhat to think that should I not live to come back, the name of Mimi Redmayne had not been forgotten in my will—although not for the world would I have had Charlotte made aware of the fact.

It was not till seven months later that permission was given me to set my face homeward, during the whole of which time, although I had had plenty of business communications from my partner, no personal news of any kind, having reference to the circle of my Tidsthorpe friends, had reached me. When, therefore, I was told, within ten minutes of my arrival at home, that Philip Redmayne had disappeared three days before, and that all sorts of rumours were rife in the town, some of them hinting at foul play, while others hardly veiled the insinuation that he had gone away of his own accord, because he found the place too hot for him to stay in any longer, I felt—to use a common expression—as if I hardly knew whether I was standing on my head or my heels. The first thing I resolved upon doing was to go up to Needwood Lodge and ferret out the facts of the case for myself.

Mimi burst into tears and flung herself into my arms the moment I entered the room. I soothed her and calmed her as best I could; but some time passed before I was able to elicit from her a connected account of what had really happened.

It appeared that, on the previous Saturday morning, her husband had left home at his usual hour for going to business. After calling at his office and looking over his letters, he had arranged to walk out as far as the Haredale limekilns, which, as already mentioned, he had bought some three or four years before. Latterly, he had been working the kilns at a considerable loss, and on that very morning he had arranged to meet his foreman there, pay off the "hands," and have the fires raked out.

It seemed to him preferable to let the kilns stand idle awhile rather than go on being money out of pocket week after week. After finishing his business at the kilns he would walk into Perrybeach—it was only a matter of four or five miles—where he was to meet a certain Mr. Dallison, who had agreed to buy Redmayne's interest in a couple of coasting schooners for the sum of two hundred and fifty pounds. As the missing man had arranged his programme, so had he pro-

ceeded to carry it out. He had settled his business at the kilns in due course, and, later on, had met Mr. Dallison, who had paid him the amount agreed on, partly in notes, and partly in gold, after which they had dined together, and had not separated till between six and seven o'clock, by which time it was quite dark. In reply to a question at parting, Phil had said that a friend of his—not mentioning any name—had promised him a lift home in his trap. But be that as it might, so far as could be ascertained, Mr. Dallison was the last person who had spoken with him. From the moment of his quitting the roof of the "Red Lion Hotel," Philip Redmayne had vanished utterly.

In the course of Monday notice had been given to the police, and a description of the missing man circulated far and wide. It was now Tuesday night, and no tidings whatever of him had come to hand. Mimi's firm belief, reiterated again and again, was that her husband had been lured to some lonely spot, and then murdered for the sake of the money in his possession; and although I pointed out to her how unlikely it was that any one except Mr. Dallison could be aware that he had so large a sum about him, I could in no wise shake her conviction on the point.

Well, time went on, till a month had gone by without bringing any clue to the mystery of Redmayne's disappearance. Meanwhile, poor Mimi was having a bad time of it at the Lodge. Phil's unexplained absence brought to light a state of affairs which both surprised and shocked me. Not only was he proved to have been over head and ears in debt, but the Lodge itself, together with whatever property he had on which money could be raised, was mortgaged up to the hilt. At the time of his disappearance he was virtually a bankrupt. Of course, the extravagant style of living into which he had so weakly fallen after his marriage had something to do with this sad state of things; but a few words which Mimi let fall one day told me all I needed to know. For the last year Phil had been speculating on the Stock Exchange, with what result was now patent to all the world.

In order to stem the storm in some measure, Mimi, by my advice, removed from the Lodge into some quiet lodgings in the town. Everything she left behind went to the hammer, and the horde of clamouring creditors were to some extent appeased thereby.

The little woman bore the change, great though it was, in a way which did not fail to elicit my admiration. The mention of Phil's name nearly always brought tears to her eyes; but in other respects she was quiet and self-possessed in a remarkable degree. She never wavered in her belief that her husband had come to his end through foul play, although I must confess that I myself had strong doubts on the point. As a matter of course, not till some absolute proof of Phil's decease should be forthcoming, would the Stork Insurance Company entertain Mimi's claim for the five thousand pounds, which her husband had settled absolutely upon her within a few weeks of their marriage.

Not long, however, was it before the requisite proof was forthcoming, and that in a way as startling as it was unexpected.

I had gone to call upon her one morning on a matter of business, when I could not help noticing that she was several times affected by brief fits of nervous trembling, such as I had never remarked in her before. It seemed to me that she was far from well, and so I told her, recommending at the same time that she should at once call in medical advice.

"You are mistaken, dear Uncle Josy," she replied. "I am not at all ill; at least, not in the way you think. I know it is very silly of me to say so; but I have been frightened. Oh, terribly!"

"In what way have you been frightened, my dear?"

"By a dream. You smile, dear uncle; but wait till I have told you what it was. I dreamt it the night before last, and again last night, exactly the same dream. Horrible, horrible!"

She shuddered, and pressed her fingers to her eyes, and for a few moments seemed altogether overcome.

Then she went on to tell me that in her dream she had seen two men, both strangers to her, carrying between them the insensible body of another man, which she at once recognised as that of her husband. Emerging, with their burden, from the shelter of a wood, they carried it up a piece of rising ground beyond, till they reached the summit of a low cliff, close against the face of which were built the limekilns already mentioned. Then, after swinging the body to and fro a few times, that it might acquire a momentum, they gave it one final swing, which sent it flying over the edge of the cliff, full into the wide-gaping mouth of one of the kilns.

Such was Mimi's singular dream as related by her to me. No wonder that her nerves were shaken by it after all she had gone through a little while before.

"If I dream it a third time I shall feel sure that it is true—that it is a revelation from the dead," she said to me at parting, "and I shall take some men and have the limekiln thoroughly searched."

Well, according to her account, she dreamt the same thing again on the third consecutive night. In any case, next morning she got three or four men together, and proceeded with them to the kilns, and pointing out one, ordered them to set to work to dig out the contents, which had been left undisturbed since the day of Phil's disappearance when he had ordered the fires to be raked out. Sure enough, the men had not been at work many minutes before they came upon a small quantity of human bones, all in a more or less calcined state. Further search brought to light a skull, two or three metal buttons, and the blade of a pocket-knife. Everything else had been wholly destroyed by the action of the lime.

At the inquest which was held on the remains, Clisby, the tailor, deposed that the buttons found in the kiln were exactly similar to those on a covert-coat he had made for Redmayne a few months before, which coat the latter was proved to have been wearing on the day of his disappearance. Mr. Dimes, the dentist, deposed that the skull produced was short of three teeth, one in the upper jaw, and two in the lower, and that he had himself at different times extracted three corresponding teeth of Redmayne's. Finally, the knife-blade, which was a somewhat peculiar one, was sworn to by three or four people as being exactly like one which Phil had been in the habit of carrying. The jury brought in a verdict in accordance with the evidence; the remains were interred as those of Philip Redmayne; and Mimi, who was an object of universal commiseration, now felt herself justified in putting on widow's weeds.

CHAPTER III.

THERE was now no reason why the five thousand pounds insurance money should not be paid, and at the widow's request I proceeded to lay her claim before the company. In due course, that is to say, after the officials had satisfied themselves with regard to the facts of the case, a

cheque for the amount came to hand, which, at my suggestion, was deposited to Mrs. Redmayne's credit in the local bank.

It was a week later when Mimi called upon me, accompanied by a tall, dark, rather good-looking young man, whom she introduced to me as her brother Pierre. I could trace no likeness whatever between the two—indeed, till that day I had never heard of the existence of such a person, but that was not to be wondered at, seeing that my godson had never told me anything about the relatives or antecedents of his wife. Mimi's object in calling on me was to tell me that she and her brother were going to set out for France on the morrow, with the intention of looking up the trustees who had charge of the inheritance which would become due to her on her twenty-first birthday—a fortnight hence. She would probably be away for three weeks or a month, she went on to say; meanwhile, she had paid for her lodgings some weeks in advance, and had arranged that they should be kept for her till her return.

So she left us, and time went on till a couple of months had gone by; but still Mimi returned not. I knew not what to think. The most feasible supposition was, that for some reason or other, the law's proverbial delay had come between her and her inheritance, and that she was awaiting on the spot the settlement of her affairs. But even supposing such to be the case, why did not the young minx write to me? She could not fail to know how uneasy her long silence would make me. But my uneasiness deepened into a nameless apprehension when, in answer to an inquiry on my part, the manager of the bank informed me that Mrs. Redmayne had withdrawn the whole amount of her deposit on the afternoon of the day before she left Tidsthorpe.

One by one the weeks sped slowly by, till the third month from the date of Mimi's departure had come and gone, without bringing any sign or token that she was still in the land of the living, when one dark autumn night, close on ten o'clock, just as I had lighted my last pipe, and mixed my last jorum of grog, before turning in, my servant brought me word that there was a man at the door, who said he had called on a matter of great importance, but refused to send in his name.

My thoughts at once flew to Mimi; perhaps the man was the bearer of a message from her; so I at once gave orders for

him to be shown in. His first act after the servant had left the room was to turn the key of the door, and thereby lock up himself and me together. I rose to my feet in some alarm; but before I could enquire the meaning of so strange a proceeding, he had flung his broad-brimmed hat aside, and had plucked off his wig and long, black beard, leaving revealed to my staring and bewildered eyes none other than Philip Redmayne!

Yes, he and no other; but, alas, how changed!

For a few moments I was so taken aback, so utterly dumbfounded, that I could not have uttered a word had my life depended on it. He was the first to speak.

"I am neither an optical illusion nor a ghost, godfather, although, by the look in your face, you seem to think I must be one or the other," he said, with a poor imitation of his old merry laugh. "I am veritable flesh and blood, I assure you; or, perhaps, I ought rather to say skin and bone, for there's not much else left of me by this time."

"Then those were not your remains that were found in the limekiln?" I contrived to gasp out.

"Not mine, most certainly."

"Then may I be permitted to ask where you have been all this long time, and why you have allowed everybody, your poor wife included, to believe you dead?"

"It is to enquire about my wife that I am here to-night. Tell me, where is she? What has become of her?"

"She left for France, several weeks ago, in order to see about her inheritance."

"Ah! And the five thousand pounds insurance money?"

"She took every farthing of it with her. But how do you happen to know that the insurance money was paid?"

"Tell me, did she go alone?" he demanded, without heeding my question.

"She was accompanied by her brother Pierre, a dark, good-looking young fellow, who——"

Redmayne sank into a chair with a groan.

"It is as I suspected. My worst fears are realised! Oh, fool! fool!"

The words came from his lips in broken and half-strangled accents, while a strange, grey pallor overspread his features. I was afraid he was about to faint, so I made haste to pour out a little spirit and offer it to him. He drank it eagerly, and in a little while a faint colour came back

into his cheeks. Then I made him draw up an easy-chair in front of the fire, and a little later, when my sister and the servants had retired for the night, I went to the larder, and brought him thence something to eat.

He was indeed changed since I had last set eyes on him. In the first place, he looked at least a dozen years older. His cheeks were sunken, his eyes seemed to have receded further into their orbits, and his brown hair was now plentifully streaked with grey. As he sat there, with his chest bent in and his shoulders half-way up to his ears, he looked like a man bowed down by the weight of some irremediable calamity.

Hour after hour we sat, till the pale daylight surprised us. How much or how little of his strange story he had, in the first instance, intended to tell me, I had no means of knowing. As circumstances fell out, he ended by telling me everything. Space will not allow of my setting it down here at length and in his own words. All I can do is to sketch its more salient features in outline.

When Philip Redmayne married Mimi Duclos, he believed that in her he had secured an angel of innocence and candour. Only by degrees did his eyes become opened to the fact that she was not merely a consummate actress, but one of those beautiful enigmas who seem sent into the world on purpose to shake one's faith in the evidence of one's own senses—a creature utterly devoid of moral principle, who, at nineteen years of age, was already an accomplished hypocrite; who cared for no one in the world but herself; who loved lies for their own sake, and would often tell them in preference to the truth, even when the latter would have served her purpose equally as well. Phil's awakening, if slow, was none the less inevitable; but even after he had realised to the full the sort of being to whom he had tied himself for life, such was his infatuation for her, so strong was the spell with which her beauty still held him, that, to all intents, he remained as completely her slave as on the day he married her. Not even when the gratification of her caprices and extravagances was urging him fast and still faster on the road to ruin had he either the power or the will to draw back, or to snap a single link of the chain by which he was being dragged to destruction.

The end was drawing very near, and Phil's resources, in the way of raising money, were all but exhausted, when his wife pro-

posed to him a certain nefarious scheme for defrauding the insurance company, which he came after a time to listen to and ultimately to fall in with. It was arranged that he should disappear and go into hiding for a time; and that after a little while such conclusive proofs of his death should be forthcoming as would satisfy not merely the public at large, but the insurance company, that he was really defunct. Then when Mimi should have obtained the five thousand pounds, she was to join him, and together they were to try their fortunes in the New World. The human remains found in the kiln had been put there by Redmayne himself on the night of his disappearance. They had formed portions of a skeleton which had been left in his charge a few years before by a friend of his, a naval surgeon, who had never reclaimed them. The extraction of three teeth to correspond with Phil's missing teeth had been a device of Mimi's, to whom, indeed, both the inception and the working out of nearly all the details of the plot were due. To what extent the precious scheme prospered, we have already seen.

"And the inheritance which she is supposed to have gone to France for the purpose of realising," I said, "has that any foundation in fact?"

"None whatever, although even I did not discover it to be a myth till nearly a year after my marriage."

"And her brother Pierre?"

"She has no brother. He is a scoundrel whom she loved before she met me, only at that time he was desperately poor. They have gone off together, taking the five thousand pounds, and she has befooled me as she has so many others."

I did not tell him that I thought he had been rightly served, although it was strongly in my mind to do so.

Presently I said:

"Although you tell me your wife was such a consummate actress, yet it seems almost too incredible for belief that the grief she professed to feel at my illness, and the tears she shed, were other than the expressions of genuine feeling."

"All put on, I assure you. Mimi could cause her tears to flow at will. She made no attempt to conceal from me her hope that you would not recover, because, as she said, she felt nearly sure that either my name, or hers, or both of them, would be found mentioned in your will."

After that I was so shocked and pained

that I had to mix myself an extra jorum of grog before I could find another word to say.

But little more remains to be told. By his own action Phil had made of himself an outcast and a beggar. He had come skulking to my house under cover of darkness, and under cover of darkness he would have to skulk away. But whatever his faults and follies had been, it was impossible that I should let him go away empty-handed. Of the two hundred and fifty pounds paid him by Mr. Dallison, he had given his wife two hundred, and had been living since then on the remainder in an obscure London lodging. He was liable to be arrested at any moment, and his only chance of safety lay in getting out of the country as speedily as possible.

It is scarcely necessary that I should reveal what ultimately became of him. It is enough to say that no message or token ever reached him from the woman who had ruined his life, and made him a lifelong outlaw from his native land.

A SPRING BIRTHDAY.

By HARRIET STOCKALL.

WHAT blossom shall we choose
From spring's bright coronal for thee,
Our one sweet, spring flower? Shall it be
A snowdrop, whiter than the snow;
A crocus-cup, with gold a-glow,
And gemmed with pearly dew?

A violet, darling, blue
As April's clear, unclouded skies,
Blue as thine own fair, happy eyes;
Sweet with a perfume that the spring
Keeps for its early blossoming,
When bud and leaf are new?

A stately daffodil,
That proudly lifts its fearless head
Above the sheltered garden-bed,
And fronts, with courage brave and free,
The March winds blowing stormily,
The cold showers dropping chill?

Ah, love! we need not give
Our flowers as emblems unto thee,
Whom Heaven hath sent our flower to be;
Whom Heaven hath gifted with delight,
To glad our hearts from morn till night,
Through all the days we live.

Thou hast the snowdrop, dear,
Pure, white, and vernal from thine heart
Youth's timid aspirations start;
And lo! thou hast the crocus-gold
Of love, true love, that braves the cold,
And shines with changeless cheer.

Thou hast the violet blue,
The hidden sweetness of a life
Set far apart from worldly strife,
Perfume of kindly words and deeds,
Colour to touch earth's common needs
With Heaven's celestial hue.

Thou hast the daffodil,
Cheery and fearless, brave and strong.
Yea, love! to thee spring's flowers belong:
White soul of snowdrop! Heart of gold!
Dearer than all Heaven's gifts we hold
Our child, our darling still.

THE CRUISE OF THE "SEA-NYPH."

By T. E. SOUTHEE.

AT anchor, just below Gravesend, only a short distance from the Terrace Pier, lay a large schooner yacht, bearing the very appropriate appellation of the "Sea-nymph." She was a beautiful craft, a veritable belle of the sea, and her owner was proud of her. She was a fast and weatherly craft, and well known among yachtsmen as a prize-winner.

It was a splendid afternoon in the latter part of August. The air was soft and balmy, and there was a fresh little breeze from west by south. It was high water—that is, the tide had just commenced to ebb, and the schooner had swung to her anchor, and was lying with her head upstream.

Two gentlemen, one in a nautical costume of plain blue serge, and the other in one which might be said to emulate Joseph's coat in its variety of colours, were lolling on the bulwarks, the latter puffing out great volumes of smoke from a by no means Liliputian pipe, and watching it floating away lazily on the summer air.

"There they are, Jack!" exclaimed the gorgeously attired gentleman, as three young girls and an old gentleman came down the pier steps, and were handed into a commodious and highly varnished gig, which was at once pushed off and rowed towards the schooner.

"I think you're right for once, Bob," replied Jack. "I recognise Maud's tall figure. I don't know much about the other two. Do you?"

"Know the Davenport girls? Yes, rather! The fact is, the elder one, Milly, is rather sweet upon me."

"Now, Bob," said Jack, shaking his head solemnly "if I did not know that you were the greatest liar upon earth, I should have to arrive at the conclusion that the young lady was sadly wanting in taste."

"Ah! that's just like you, Jack; your vanity is egregious," replied Bob.

"No, no, the boot is on the other leg, old man; but here they come," exclaimed Jack, as the boat ranged alongside, and the ladies were being handed up the ladder.

"What a lovely yacht!" exclaimed Maud Brennan, as she took Jack Morton's hand, and was assisted on deck.

"So glad you consented to come," he

said, softly, with one of his pleasant smiles.

There was a slight flush on Maud's cheeks when Mr. Morton relinquished her hand, after retaining it rather longer than was necessary to reach the deck in safety.

"I knew you were at the bottom of this," she whispered.

"No, indeed I was not," he responded, in the same low tone. "It was entirely Frank's suggestion."

Maud Brennan, in the estimation of Jack Morton, and, indeed, in the estimation of most people who had an eye for beauty, was a very lovely creature. She was attired in orthodox yachting costume—blue Oxford jacket with gilt anchor buttons, a skirt of the same coloured serge, and a jaunty little hat of the true nautical type.

Two other girls in the same piquant costume now stepped on deck.

"My cousins," commenced Maud.

"Oh, you need not trouble yourself, Maud, dear," said Milly, the elder of the two. "We have met before. How do you do, Mr. Morton?" and she offered him her hand.

"You never told me that you knew my cousins," said Maud, in a slightly querulous tone.

"Because I did not know that the Miss Davenports were your cousins," he replied, quickly. "And how does Miss Dolly do?" he continued, as that young lady came forward.

"Quite well, thanks," replied Dolly, rather stiffly. She did not want to be Dollyed by other people's sweethearts, so she turned up her pretty nose and passed on.

"And here is Mr. Tyson," cried Milly; "now here's a surprise!"

"I hope it's not an unpleasant one," said Bob, taking her proffered hand.

"No, no," she replied, and there was a tinge on her cheeks and a sparkle in her brown eyes which fully confirmed his words.

By this time Frank Easton, the owner of the yacht, had assisted Mr. Brennan out of the boat, and after a few passing compliments, the whole party went aft. Meantime the crew were busy loosing the sails and weighing the anchors, and in a very short time the schooner, with a fair wind, was ploughing her way down the Lower Hope at the rate of ten knots an hour. They were on their way to Norway, a trip which Frank Easton had arranged entirely for the benefit of his friend, Jack Morton. He said nothing to his friend

and not a word to Maud. They were in love. Frank felt sure of that. Jack was diffident and Maud was shy, and he imagined a week or two of close companionship would remedy all this. Thus it was that Frank argued. He had asked the two Miss Davenport to join them, simply that Jack might have a fair field. He had seen very little of these young ladies, and had no idea of the danger he was likely to incur by exposing himself to their fascinations, especially those of little Dolly. His intentions were to look after his yacht, for he was his own sailing-master, and leave his friends to entertain the girls.

This, however, did not accord with the view of Miss Dolly Davenport, and she had not been an hour on board the "Sea-nymph" before all his good resolutions were being put to flight by this pretty and fascinating girl. She asked such funny questions; her remarks were so quaint; her manner so easy and natural that he was half in love with her before he knew where he was.

She made a charming picture as she stood on the quarter-deck, with her little hands thrust into the pockets of her jacket, her hair ruffled, and her naturally delicate colour heightened by the breeze, and her eyes sparkling as she listened to Frank's explanations of things pertaining to the sea.

"Isn't it delightful!" she said, as the vessel, with her sheets eased off and her balloon jib bellying out in a graceful curve, sped lightly over the water; "it's the easiest and most pleasant mode of progression I know of."

"It's not all sunshine on the ocean," replied Frank. "It's beautiful now; but there are such things as rough seas and stormy skies."

"Oh, but that would be lovely! Do you think we shall see anything of them this cruise? I should so love to see a storm at sea," she exclaimed.

"I should hope not!" he replied, looking up softly into her face, and smiling at her girlish enthusiasm. "If you had a taste of one, I don't think you would want to try a second."

"You think I should be afraid," she said, meditatively. "Well, I don't know; it's a feeling I have never experienced, so the experiment would be a novel one, and I should like to try it."

"Were you never frightened?" he asked.

"Not that I can remember."

At this moment the steward announced

that tea was served, and they all descended to the saloon. The cabin of the "Sea-nymph" was a picture of luxurious neatness, and all the arrangements for the meal were as *recherché*, as the cabin was elegant.

It was a superb night. The sky was clear and bright; the moonlight was sleeping in dreamlike splendour on the waters. All was still and silent in the sky and upon the ocean. The wind had gone down with the sun, and the only sound that occasionally broke the stillness was the soft murmuring rill of the water as the vessel passed through it, which seemed to say, "Hush!" as though Nature feared that any louder sound should interrupt her calm repose.

It was a pleasant and picturesque group that sat on the deck of the "Sea-nymph" and gazed at this beautiful picture.

The most prominent figure in it was that of Robert Tyson. Not because his physical proportions were greater, or his physiognomonic beauty superior to his sex, but simply because his costume, if not more attractive, was more noticeable.

His great hobby was swimming, and he was continually vaunting his proficiency in the art of natation. Not that he had ever achieved anything remarkable in that line, but he was deeply impressed with the notion that he could if he tried.

"It is not likely," he was saying, "that I should make an exhibition of myself; but if I was cast away, say in the Indian Ocean, or the Pacific, you'd be sure to hear of me landing in the nearest group of islands I came to."

"No doubt, no doubt," said Mr. Brennan, who had a quiet vein of humour in him; "that is, provided you could carry enough provisions for the journey."

"That's just the point," replied Bob. "It isn't the swimming, it's the grub that's the difficulty."

Dolly laughed a ringing, mocking laugh. "Now, that is too bad, Mr. Tyson; you've taken all the romance out of your story. I was just concocting a beautiful idyl of a shipwrecked mariner, swimming on shore in an exhausted state, and fainting as soon as he reached a palm grove in the vicinity of the shore. When returning consciousness came, there was a beautiful Indian maiden bending over him, like Haides over Don Juan; and you upset it all by saying, 'it's the grub that's the difficulty!' Grub! What an unphiloso-

phical mode of speaking of nutriment; the man who invented it ought to be hanged."

"How do you know it was a man?" asked Frank.

"Because, sir," replied Dolly, with dignity, "a woman would never have thought of doing anything so silly."

"Oh, come, come; that will not do, Miss Dolly," exclaimed Tyson. "It's not fair to apportion all the silliness to the masculine portion of humanity."

"I think it's time we all turned in," said Mr. Brennan, who thought the conversation was taking a disagreeable turn. "Come, girls, do you know what time it is?" he continued, taking out his watch. "Twelve o'clock, I do declare!" And throwing away the end of his cigar, he rose, and disappeared down the companion, followed by the others.

Two sunny days and starlit nights had passed since the "Sea-nymph" left the Thames. Never had the sea smiled more seductively than it did on the morning of the third day as Frank Easton and Dolly Davenport sat in their wicker chairs, gazing out on the broad expanse of ocean, whose sapphire-coloured waves were sparkling in the sunlight.

It was like a dream, Dolly said, so tranquil were the sea and the sky, and so still was everything.

Milly had ceased to chide her sister, for she was too much occupied with her new lover, Bob Tyson.

Old Mr. Brennan had been complaining of his corns, and was prophesying a change in the weather. "After a calm comes a storm," he said.

"Let it come!" exclaimed Bob Tyson, valiantly; "I'm not afraid! There's no possible danger in a yacht of this size, even if we should fall in with a squall."

"I hope we shall!" exclaimed Dolly. "That would be grand!"

"I don't care much about storms at sea," said Maud, "they are generally so wet! But, papa, dear," she went on, "you don't really think we are going to have a storm, do you?"

"I can't tell, child," replied the old gentleman, "I only know that my corns have been shooting abominably, and that, with me, always portends bad weather."

"I don't believe in weather prognostics," remarked Bob Tyson. "I always take them like dreams, by contraries."

"Long foretold, long last; short notice,

down fast," quoted Jack Morton. "What do you say to that, Bob?"

"Say! why, that I've seen the mercury rising when it has been blowing a gale of wind!"

"Yes, but that was because it had previously fallen," replied Jack.

"But is the glass going down now?" asked Milly, tremulously.

"Yes, it has gone down three-tenths since breakfast," answered Frank.

Milly looked scared.

"Don't be frightened," whispered Mr. Tyson. "It's all right! I'll take care of you. I'm an old sailor, you know!"

Milly gave him a glance of thankfulness, and the conversation passed to another subject.

As the day progressed, the heavens became more threatening. The sky in the east was black and lowering. There was very little wind, and what there was came in fitful puffs. Shortly after four o'clock the rain commenced to descend in torrents. This lasted only a short time, and it then cleared off. The bank in the east broke away, the sky was bright, the sun shone, and a nice working breeze sprang up from the north-east.

"It's all over," laughed Bob, "I thought you were making a great fuss about nothing."

"Not so fast, my dear fellow," answered Frank, "that's only the prelude; the play is to come."

"We shall see!" remarked Mr. Tyson, oracularly.

For more than an hour it seemed as though he were right; the breeze held, and the yacht flew rapidly through the water. Then it fell, and the sea was stark calm, the atmosphere was unusually oppressive. The silence was strangely impressive, the smallest sound being distinctly audible, while the men's voices on the fore-castle, though remarkably distinct, had a hollow, far-off ring in them.

Dolly had never been gayer, brighter, or more amusing; but Maud and Milly were very silent, and in their hearts wished they had never been tempted to trust themselves to the treacherous ocean.

The sunset was wild and portentous. The great orb as it sank towards the sea assumed a deep blood-red hue, and when it disappeared beneath the horizon, it still sent, as it were, broad streaks of fire across the pale blue sky.

Then, gradually, dense darkness over-

spread the heavens, and in the distance there were hoarse mutterings of thunder.

"Now what do you say, Mr. Tyson?" asked Dolly.

Before he could reply, the sky was illuminated by a blaze of the most vivid lightning, which was followed by a peal of thunder that sounded like the crack of doom.

Bob Tyson turned as pale as death, exclaiming: "Good God! What is it?" then, turning suddenly, he made an abrupt dive, and, disappearing down the companion, made for his berth.

No one had time to notice this, for at the same time a heavy squall of wind struck the yacht and caused her to reel and stagger for an instant, and then heel over till she was almost on her beam-ends. Then she recovered herself and flew off at the top of her speed.

Dolly stood mute and awestricken, clinging to one of the after backstays.

"You had better go below, my dear young lady," said Frank; "this is no place for you; it will rain directly, and you will get soaked."

"Oh, no, no; let me stop where I am," she said; and then, after a pause, "I suppose it is very dreadful to say so, but I'm delighted. Isn't it grand?"

"Yes," he replied, "it is grand, but it is dangerous, and I advise you to go below," and she obeyed.

The sky was now one black pall, through which an occasional flash of lightning forked out like a tongue of flame, followed by peals of deep-voiced thunder, which echoed and re-echoed across the firmament in profoundest diapason.

All the winds of heaven seemed to be engaged in a wild warfare, sweeping before them the poor "Sea-nymph," which, with close-reefed foresail and mainsail and storm jib, was flying over the hissing and foaming sea, as if defying the storm.

Presently, as Frank and the mate stood watching the storm, the look-out forward sang out: "Breakers ahead!"

"Breakers?" echoed the mate, as he hurried forward. "The fellow must be mad! There are no rocks or sands within a hundred miles of us."

"There! There!" continued the man, pointing forward, "right ahead!"

"Breakers! Those are not breakers," exclaimed the mate, "it's a waterspout! Luff! luff!"

But it was too late; the next instant an avalanche of water descended on the

devoted craft. There was a noise as of the tearing and rending of spars, mingled with half-despairing human cries, and the next instant the "Sea-nymph" was lying a helpless wreck on the water.

It was past four o'clock, and the morning was dawning greyly. There were clouds in the sky, but the gale was dying out, sobbing sullenly like a child after a violent fit of passion, and the sea was falling. In the east all was clear, the morning star was slowly rising, and was already several degrees above the horizon, against which the heaving billows as they rose and fell cut out darkly. Then came the red glow of the advancing sun, tinging the sky and every shred of cloud with a crimson glow.

When at last daylight dawned on that sullen sea, it showed the poor "Sea-nymph" wrecked, and dismasted, but still afloat, rolling heavily on the long ground swells. Of her crew only a portion remained; the mate, and four of the watch on deck, had been swept into eternity by that avalanche of water which had fallen on her deck.

When the catastrophe happened, Dolly Davenport was in the act of stepping into her berth. For a moment she stood paralysed. The noise of the falling avalanche was terrific, and it almost stunned her. Then there came a rush down the companion, and she found herself up to her knees in water.

"What is it? What has happened?" was asked on all sides.

Dolly hastily threw on a dressing-gown and returned to the saloon. Here she encountered Robert Tyson, who with blanched cheeks and staring eyes was frantically calling for "Help!"

"Good heavens!" he shrieked, "we shall all be drowned! Help! help! Frank! Frank! Where are you? Save me, save me! Oh, why did I ever come on this cursed voyage? Why did I trust myself on this treacherous sea?" And he sank on his knees with a shrill cry of agony, but sprang up again suddenly on finding himself immersed in water.

By this time the rest of the party had gathered in the saloon, and were gazing, panic-stricken, into each other's faces. It was a time to test the courage of a man; but Dolly's did not fail her even at this critical moment.

She stood quite still. She felt that in all probability the vessel was sinking,

and, sending up a prayer to heaven for help and succour, she stood calmly waiting her doom.

At this moment there came the sound of voices, and then the clanking of the pumps. These infused hopes into her heart, and her thoughts at once flew to Frank—where was he?

Jack Morton was making for the deck, and she followed him. It was pitch dark when they reached it; but a moment afterwards a rift in the clouds threw a gleam of moonlight on the scene, and they saw a group of dark figures on the main deck, but there was not light enough to distinguish them individually.

"Do you see him?" asked Dolly.

"See who?"

"Mr. Easton!"

"No, but I will soon ascertain if he is all right!"

He was passing forward, when he stumbled on a prostrate form. He stooped down and raised it, and, as he did so, another gleam of moonlight passed over the wreck, and a cry of horror escaped from Dolly's lips as she recognised the ghastly features of her lover.

"Is he hurt—is he dead?" she gasped.

"No," answered Jack, after he had felt his pulse. "Thank Heaven! There's life in the old boy yet!"

Dolly made no sign, but her heart gave a great bound, and a prayer of thankfulness went up to heaven as she assisted Morton to carry him to the companion. Never before had her heart been filled with such grief and terror. To see this handsome and good-hearted young fellow whom she loved, and who she knew also loved her, lying white and unconscious on one of the sofas in the cabin, gave her a shock such as she had never before experienced.

Restoratives were administered, and it was some time before Frank recovered consciousness. By this time the steward had opened a trap hatch in the floor. The water had run off into the hold, and things had been restored to something like order.

"I know nothing," he said, in answer to their enquiries, "except that there was a cry of 'breakers,' and the mate called to the helm man to 'loff!' The next moment I received a blow on my head, and all was dark."

"It was a waterspout," suggested Mr. Brennan. "And I fancy we may be very thankful things are no worse. I have read that when one falls on a

ship, it usually occasions its instant destruction."

There was a pause for a moment, and then Jack said: "Well, as you seem better, old boy, I'll go on deck again and see how the land lies."

The aspect of things there was anything but encouraging. The vessel was dismasted, the bulwarks had been mostly carried away, and the boats had been smashed. It was a bad look-out, and their only chance was that they might be rescued by a passing vessel.

Jack Morton went forward.

"Can't you gentlemen give us a spell at the pumps?" asked the second mate. "If not, we shall be done up soon, though my chaps won't give in while they have got a jog in 'em. There's no mistake about it, sir, it's for dear life."

Jack saw the wisdom of this course, and went aft and had a whispered colloquy with Frank.

"Yes, certainly," he replied; "you go and turn out that lazy beggar Tyson, while I go on deck and see about it. Will you come too, Mr. Brennan?" Then, as they passed the pantry, he continued, "Steward, give the men a glass of grog and a biscuit!"

So the time passed. A signal of distress had been hoisted on a spar lashed to the stump of the main-mast, and as soon as the morning mist had cleared away, a sharp look-out had been kept for any sail that might heave in sight; but though the sea and the horizon had been swept repeatedly with the glass, not a sign of anything but sea and sky could be seen.

Everything had now been done that could be to discover and stop the leak; but all had failed, the only alternative left was to fother a sail, and in that way stop it; but that, too, had failed, for an hour afterwards when the pumps had been sounded, instead of any diminution, there was still a decided increase. It was then that the utter hopelessness of their position began to dawn on the whole party, and blank dismay was written on every countenance. Even the sailors lost heart. "If the end must come," they said, "it might as well come sooner as later."

"What is the matter?" asked Dolly, who was standing by Frank's side; "what have they left off pumping for?"

"Because, they say, it is useless."

"But you are not going to give in, are you?" flashed Dolly.

"No," he replied, and whispered, "not

while there's a chance of saving you, my darling!" Then, turning to Morton, he said: "Come on, Jack, we'll take the starboard pump, let who will take the other."

No sooner were the words uttered than Dolly passed aft, and was speaking to Maud.

"It's life or death, dear," she was saying, "we can but try!" and the next instant they had seized the other pump brake and were working away manfully, one, two, three, and a pause, as if they had all their lives been used to the work.

But the men could not stand by and see two young ladies doing their work, and they sprang forward, one of them saying: "Avast there, ladies, we can't stand this."

But Dolly gave an indignant refusal.

"No, no!" she cried, "when we're tired you can take your spell," and she and Maud continued to ply the brake vigorously.

"Mr. Easton!" called out Maud, as she and Dolly sat panting after their exertion, "what is that in the distance? There!" she continued, pointing with her fingers.

"That," continued Frank, after a pause, "that is the smoke of a steamer!"

In a moment all was excitement. Hope, that "lingers long and latest dies," once more revived in their breasts, and the men set to work at the pumps with an ardour and perseverance which formed a thrilling contrast to their recent torpor and dejection.

Half an hour had been spent in all the agony of suspense. The smoke, which at first was only faintly descried on the horizon, came nearer and nearer, and then the dark hull of a large vessel was plainly discernible.

"Best fire a gun, sir," said one of the men, "or he'll not see us else."

"Yes, Coats, you are quite right. If we don't attract their attention, they won't come within miles of us."

Boom! went the signal gun of distress. Boom! boom! again, but the steamer held on her course. She was only about five miles distant; but, unfortunately, the wind was in her favour, and consequently the sound was carried away from instead of towards her.

Gun after gun had been fired, and now the steamer was abreast of the yacht, and no notice had been taken of their signals, and from a delirium of joy and expectation they fell into a profound despondency. Still the men continued to work vigorously

at the pumps; but, notwithstanding all their efforts, gradually, little by little, the water increased. When the pumps were sounded, it was found that there were four inches more than there were two hours previous, and the vessel was getting so low on the water that both the fore and main channels were almost awash with the sea.

Frank and the mate had calculated that the vessel might, if nothing happened, float four-and-twenty hours; and there had been a consultation as to what had best be done. Jack Morton had suggested that their only chance was to make a raft. But to suggest such an idea and to find the materials for its construction were two different things. Without spars, a raft was an impossibility, and most of the spars the "Sea-nymph" possessed broke adrift in the storm.

In the midst of this, there came a cry from the forecabin: "I've found it, sir! I've found it!" and one of the men came rushing aft in a state of great excitement.

"Found what?" asked Easton.

"The leak, sir! The leak! It's in the bows, just under the bilge streaks; and now that we have found it, we'll soon stop it."

"Thank Heaven! Thank Heaven!" exclaimed Frank, and he ran off to the cabin to communicate the intelligence.

Inspired by this cheering news, the men forgot their fatigue, and laboured away strenuously at the pumps, and in little more than an hour a loud cheer announced that the pumps sucked, and that the danger of foundering, which had menaced them for so many hours, was at an end.

Under such circumstances people do strange things—things they would never have thought of doing under ordinary conditions. So it came to pass that when Frank Easton came aft and explained the cause of the men's cheering, Dorothy Davenport, in her joy and excitement, threw her arms about his neck and kissed him; and poor old Mr. Brennan, in the exuberance of his gladness, not only shed tears, but also seized Mr. Tyson's hand and shook it cordially.

It must not be thought that Dolly was acting an unmaidenly part, or that in giving him this brief embrace, so full of love and tenderness, she was transgressing against the proprieties, because they were in truth betrothed lovers. In the darkness and dangers of the past she and Frank had entered into a little com-

pact, and had vowed to love and cherish each other to their lives' end.

The fine weather which had set in after the storm had now lasted three days, and during this time a great deal of work had been done, and the "Sea-nymph," though she did not present a very rakish or attractive appearance, was at least under canvas, and was slowly making for the English coast. Fortunately, the wind was fair, and they were expecting every minute to sight the great promontory of Flamborough Head.

Dolly Davenport and Frank were seated hand in hand on the taffrail, talking in low tones, now and again relapsing into silence—a sweet, eloquent silence; a silence which spoke of a trustful though unexpressed sympathy and unalloyed happiness. They had been talking of the peril they had just passed through, and of their happy deliverance; and it all appeared like a hideous dream from which they had just awakened.

Occasionally they heard voices from the cabin where Jack Morton was devoting himself to Maud Brennan, who, to his intense satisfaction, was gazing fondly into his clear, honest eyes. They, too, were happy, for though no words had been spoken, their hearts were full of joy and love.

As to Bob, he had felt that since his escapade in the storm he had lost caste with his friends in the cabin, and was trying, and not without some success, to make new ones among the hands forward, where he was smoking his large pipe and narrating his wonderful exploits in the nautical art to an attentive audience.

Milly and her uncle were amusing themselves with a game of chess, for she, too, had given Mr. Tyson the cold shoulder, having determined that, notwithstanding his wealth and position, she could not marry a coward.

"There's the Flamborough Head light, sir," said the man at the helm, "just visible on the starboard bow."

"All right, Jackson; keep her as she is," answered Frank. "If we get close in with the land we may fall in with a steamer or a tug."

"Listen!" cried Dolly.

"What is it, dearest?" asked Frank.

"The thud of paddle-wheels," she replied. The vessel—the noise of whose paddle-wheels had attracted Dolly's attention—proved to be a Scotch steamer,

bound for the Thames, and having been hailed by Frank Easton, her captain agreed, for a fairly good remuneration, to take the wreck of the yacht in tow, and she was soon safely at her old anchorage off the Terrace Pier, and thus ended the cruise of the "Sea-nymph."

Of course, full and particular accounts of this perilous cruise appeared in the daily newspapers, and became a topic of conversation at the clubs, and a gentleman who was well aware of Mr. Tyson's idiosyncrasy, accosted him, with a view to draw him out.

"Aw, yes, I was on board," and then followed a long account of the accident, and then he went on to remark: "I'm not in the habit of boasting—such a thing is quite out of my line. But," he went on with bland dignity, "the affair might have had a very different termination if I had not been on board. The situation, I admit, was a perilous one, and I am not surprised that some of those on board lost their heads. But, fortunately, Bob Tyson is no coward, and instead of sitting down with his hands before him, or being seized with panic, he encouraged the sailors, most of whom were half frantic with terror, and setting them an example, manned the pumps, and succeeded in keeping the vessel afloat till the leak was stopped."

"Bravo! bravo! Very good of you indeed, Mr. Tyson," exclaimed a voice behind him, and on turning round he found himself face to face with Richard Davenport, who was standing convulsed with suppressed laughter. "Excuse my laughing, my dear fellow," he said, "but your account and that of my sister Milly differ materially—she says the boat was on the other leg, and that it was you who lost your head."

Tyson was completely taken aback; he flushed crimson, and began stammering out a lame sort of apology; but, as Mr. Davenport followed this up by giving a vivid description of the scene in the cabin during the storm, the laughter and chaff became more than he could bear, and forced him to make a most precipitate retreat.

In conclusion it must be stated that Frank Easton's plan for the furtherance of the happiness of his friend Jack Morton answered exceedingly well. Like Frank and Dolly, the peril and danger through which they had passed had only drawn them much more closely together.

PIET'S BARGAIN.

By M. K. BOUSFIELD.

Author of "Count Paolo's Ring," "All Hallow's Eve," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

ONCE upon a time—more than seven years ago now—I, Molly Mackenzie, was standing by our garden gate looking out across the veldt for my brother Jesse, who had ridden off, early that morning, to a sheep-farm some miles away. Sundown was approaching, and I, with the help of Bridget, our old servant, had already prepared the supper and spread the table in the verandah, and now I was standing by the gate looking out for Jesse. By-and-by I saw him coming, and saw also that he had a stranger with him.

Holmwood, as Jesse had called our house—after the old house in England—was a very lonely place, ten miles from any other station, and twenty from a town; but I never felt it dull. Jesse and I were very happy together, and we often had visitors—passing strangers, in need of a supper and a bed, always found both at Holmwood.

Jesse introduced this stranger to me as a Doctor Despard, and I felt at once, as he took off his hat and bowed to me, that he was different from most of our visitors. He was not particularly handsome, but there was an air of distinction about him, and his voice was so low and pleasant that I felt favourably impressed at once; and so, while Jesse took him to his bedroom, I went into the kitchen, and prepared some extra dainty dish for supper, and arranged some fresh flowers in the vases that stood on the supper-table.

I had never troubled to do so before for any visitor; not even when Piet de Beer—the rich Boer at whom all the girls in the country-side were supposed to be setting their caps—rode over to see us, which he did more frequently than I quite approved of; but I did not wish this stranger to consider us quite beyond the pale of civilisation.

That was an evening never to be forgotten! A kind of landmark in my life. I did not talk very much, but I sat by Jesse's side and listened to the men's talk, and watched the Southern Cross shining in a deep-blue sky, and the fireflies flashing in and out of the verandah. A happy, blessed evening, the forerunner of still happier days to come!

Three weeks passed. Christmas was close at hand, and still Martin Despard remained with us at Holmwood. Both Jesse and I were so pleased with him that, whenever he spoke of leaving us, we always found some good reason why he should stay a little longer. He was very frank and communicative, and at a very early stage of our friendship he had spoken to me of his home and people, and even read me some of his sister's letters, till I soon grew to feel as if I had a personal acquaintance with both sister and mother, and with the genial old bachelor uncle, with whom they lived and whose heir Martin Despard was.

"Just after I had taken my M.D., I had a sharp attack of typhoid fever," so he told me that same afternoon, "and as my doctor recommended a sea voyage, I came first to the Cape, and afterwards to Durban, and then, as my health was completely re-established, I determined to run up to the Gold Fields, and try if I couldn't make a fortune there."

"I hope you may make it," I retorted; "but the accounts are not very favourable just now. I only know one man who has done any good there, and he is one of those favoured mortals who seem to succeed in everything they attempt. Jesse says that everything Piet de Beer touches turns to gold! He has, certainly, been wonderfully lucky, both at Kimberley and the Fields."

"Is he a friend of yours?" Martin asked.

"Yes; at least, we have known him all our lives," I answered. "He has a large farm about twelve miles from here, and he often rides over. He has been in town lately, or you would have seen him before now."

"What is he like? Old or young; handsome or ugly?"

I smiled demurely, and glanced at him over the great leaf which I was waving to and fro before my face, and using as a fan.

"He is Jesse's age," I said, "twenty-nine. And he is just the very handsomest man I ever saw in my life. He is very tall and finely made; his features are perfect; and his beard is the envy of all the men in the neighbourhood! It is long, and silky, and dark, and his eyes are darker still, and wonderfully bright and expressive. Indeed, he is, as I said before, the very handsomest man I ever saw."

"But you don't like him!"

Martin laughed gaily; his frown vanished, and he leant forward and looked up merrily into my face.

"No, you need not deny it," he said, imperiously; "you don't like him, in spite of his good looks and his riches! Well," he drew a long breath, "I was just on the point of envying him, a minute ago; I don't now. I wouldn't change places with him for the whole universe, just on that account; because, in spite of all his gifts and graces, he has failed to win your liking."

"Oh, I like him well enough," I said. "I have known him all my life; and he was very kind and helpful to us last year, during the war. If it had not been for him, I dare say our house might have shared the fate of several others we heard of, and have been burnt over our heads. As it was, we were not molested in the least, and Jesse always declares our safety was due to Piet's influence."

"He is a Boer, then?"

"Yes, a Boer of the Boers! He hates the English with all his heart; and, indeed, he has cause to do so," I answered, gravely.

"Why?" Martin asked, curiously.

"His mother was a very beautiful woman, and he was passionately attached to her, and she left her husband and home with an Englishman, who had been their guest. Piet was a boy of fifteen then; old enough to understand and smart under the disgrace she had brought upon them, and he has hated the English, and everything English, since."

"He seems an amiable character," Martin said, drily; "I don't wonder you don't like him."

"Oh, but that is not the reason," I said, quickly. "We used to be great friends, once, when I was a child; but, lately, I—for some silly reason or other—have taken a dislike to him," I faltered, and then, moved by a sudden impulse, I put my hand on his arm, and I made a confession to him which I had never breathed to any one before. "I believe I am a little afraid of him sometimes," I said, nervously.

"Afraid? Nonsense! Why should you be afraid of him?" Martin cried.

I hesitated.

"He—likes me, you know," I said; "and when he asked me to marry him, and I said it was quite impossible, he only laughed and looked at me oddly, and said:

"So you think now, my heart; but I will make the impossible the possible, some day."

"And, indeed, sometimes I am almost afraid he will," I whispered. "Bridget says he has the evil eye, and she always crosses herself when he looks at her, for protection. Ah, you are laughing at me."

I coloured, and would have drawn my hand hastily away; but he was holding it now on his arm, and his clasp tightened as he spoke. The amused smile, which my last words had called up in his eyes, vanished, and there came there instead a look so full of infinite protecting love and tenderness that, again, my heart beat tumultuously, and the happy blushes dyed my cheeks again.

"Nay; that he never shall," he said, "if only you will give me the right to protect you against him—against all the world. Will you, darling Molly? See, I have loved you since the first day we met, and I have gone on loving you more and more every day and every hour since then."

And then, as I was still silent—for, indeed, my head and heart were throbbing so wildly, and every nerve in my body was quivering with the delight and surprise which his sudden declaration of love had brought to me, that I could not speak—he bent his head and covered my hand with kisses.

"Say something kind to me, Molly. Tell me that you love me just a little," he whispered.

I laughed nervously.

"A little? Well, perhaps, I do—just a little," I said.

"No; not a little. I will not be content with that; with nothing less than your whole heart," my masterful lover cried. "It is mine, is it not, Molly?"

"Oh, you know it is," I cried; and then I started and coloured violently, and snatched my hand from his, for, just at that moment, there came the sound of horse's feet, and Piet de Beer rode up to the gate.

I saw him first, and I knew that his bright eyes had noticed my sudden movement and flushed cheeks; for there swept over his face a look of such mingled rage and disappointment that banished its beauty at once, and made it hideous and loathsome in my sight.

It passed in a minute, and I went forward, and—for why should I fear him

now, I, who had my gallant English lover for a protector!—gave him the welcome I was far from feeling.

"What a stranger you are! Jesse will be so glad to see you," I said.

"A stranger? Yes, I have been in town for nearly three weeks. I couldn't get away before," he answered.

He glanced at Martin Despard. I introduced the two men, and, after a rather constrained conversation, I slipped away to order some refreshment for our unwelcome guest, and left him alone with Martin. Jesse came in presently. Piet de Beer was a favourite with him; they always got on well together, and, indeed, he had been a good neighbour to us; and I should have liked him well if—if he had been content with liking. But, as he was not, and as I could never—not even if I had never known Martin Despard—have given him the love he asked, I felt a little afraid and distrustful of him.

"Take care on him, honey," Bridget had once said solemnly to me; "he's a bad 'un, if iver there were one, and he'll stick at nothin' to gain his own ends."

I felt convinced that Bridget was right, and I grew more and more sure of it as the evening went on, and I saw the fierce, furtive glances which every now and then he cast from me to Martin; and noticed, too, how eagerly he listened when we spoke to each other.

I don't think either of the others noticed it; for he was apparently in the highest spirits, professed himself delighted to make Martin's acquaintance, and amused us all with his descriptions of some queer people he had met in town; but, in spite of all this, I distrusted him more and more as the evening went on.

It happened that, just before he left, he and I were alone together for a few minutes. Martin had gone into the house, and Jesse went to speak to one of the men, and left us alone in the verandah. We talked a few minutes on indifferent subjects, then he said, suddenly:

"Molly, is this news that I hear true?"

"What news?" I said.

"What news? Oh, you know," he said. "Is it true that you have thrown me over for this cursed Englishman? It can't be, Molly! Oh, say it is not true, darling! Why, I have loved you all my life!" he cried.

His fierce tone changed to one of passionate entreaty; and he took my hand and

held it in his hot, trembling fingers. I think I liked him better at that moment than I had ever done before; for I was sorry for him, and, as every one knows, pity is akin to love. So, as I could not give him the denial he asked, I was silent for a moment.

"Yes, it is true," I said, at last.

The moonlight was falling full upon his face, and as I said the words I glanced up at him, and was startled to see how white and rigid it had grown, and with what a red, angry light his eyes were flaming. They looked like danger-signals, I thought; and there was danger also in his voice, as he answered in a low, deliberate tone, full of suppressed rage and passion:

"I told you once, nearly a year ago, that I would not give you up; that you should be no man's wife but mine. I tell you it again now! What, do you think that I, who have loved you for years, will allow this Englishman, who was a perfect stranger to you only a few weeks ago, to come between me and my heart's desire—to win from me the only girl I ever loved, or wanted for my wife? I tell you no—a thousand times no! My wife you shall be, or, if not mine, no other man's!"

"You forget! It takes two to make a bargain, Mr. de Beer. I say to you now what I said nearly a year ago, when you did me the honour of asking me to marry you—I do not love you, and I will not be your wife."

"And I say you will do both some day!"

I set my teeth firmly.

"I won't!" I said. "I hate you now! I would rather die than marry you."

He laughed oddly. In spite of my resistance, he drew me closer to him, so close, that I could feel his hot breath on my cheek; so close, that his eyes seemed to look straight down into mine.

"Perhaps it might come to that some day," he said. "Perhaps you may have to choose between death and me! Don't you think that I would make the more acceptable bridegroom of the two, Molly?"

"No, I don't," I said, stoutly.

His tight clasp relaxed as I spoke, and he dropped my hand, and fell back a few paces, as Jesse and Martin appeared at the further end of the verandah.

"I don't want to hurry you, Piet, but your horse is ready; and you will scarcely reach home before the moon sets if you don't start at once," Jesse said, in his cheery voice.

"I will go now. Good night, Molly."

"Good night," I answered, civilly; but I absolutely declined to see his offered hand, and the black look came over his face again, as he said a hasty good-night to Martin, and left the verandah.

"Come to the gate, Molly, and speed the parting guest," Martin said, gaily.

He put his hand through my arm and led me out of the verandah into the moonlit, fragrant garden. A Kafir boy was holding De Beer's horse at the gate; it was a beautiful creature, one of the strongest and swiftest horses in the colony; and, in spite of my anger, I could not help admiring both horse and rider as they stood at the gate in the moonlight.

"He is a splendid fellow, Molly! What bad taste you must have to prefer me to him!" Martin whispered.

I laughed feverishly.

"Yes, it is odd, but it is true all the same," I answered; and then, out of pure recklessness and bravado, I put my hand through his arm and drew closer to him.

De Beer was looking at me, and there came such an evil expression over his face, that involuntarily I shuddered, and drew still closer to Martin.

He looked down at me tenderly.

"What is it, sweetheart? Are you cold, or frightened? You look both," he said, anxiously.

And at his tender tone the colour came back to my cheeks, and the courage to my heart, and I laughed gaily.

"I shall never be frightened again now—now, when I have you to protect me. How could I?" I said.

CHAPTER II.

I DID not tell either Jesse or Martin of my stormy interview with Piet de Beer. I knew Jesse would feel hurt and annoyed, for he liked Piet well; and as Martin was naturally of a somewhat fiery temperament, I was afraid that he would express his opinion too plainly to Piet when next they met. So, as a quarrel between the two men was the last thing I desired, I determined to keep silence.

I was glad I had done so when, next day, Piet rode over to apologise for what he called his unpardonable conduct. He asked my forgiveness so humbly that I could not help promising to forget and forgive; but though I promised, and tried to be as pleasant and gracious to him as usual, I did not quite believe either in his

humility or in the liking and admiration which he professed to feel for Martin. Martin was anxious for our wedding to take place at once, or, at all events, not later than February or March; and though at first I laughed and declared the idea to be absurd and impossible, I gradually grew to think it quite possible, especially as just then, Jesse, who had always had a kind of contempt for girls and matrimony, fell suddenly over head and ears in love with a pretty Durban girl, who was on a visit to one of our neighbours.

She was just the kind of girl to suit him, and to make him a good wife, pretty, and bright, and capable; and I was delighted when Jesse told me that she had accepted him. The thought of leaving Jesse alone at Holmwood was the one bitter drop in my cup of bliss; and now that it was removed, I was perfectly happy.

Christmas came, and passed, and January, which is always a hot month, and was unusually hot that year, passed also. The two weddings were to be celebrated on the same day; and one morning in February, Jesse and Martin rode into town to make the necessary arrangements. Bridget was also from home. She had some relations in Maritzburg, and, a few days before had gone to pay them a visit; so, except for the two Kafirs, I was alone in the house.

Jesse and Martin had started at sunrise, in order to escape the midday heat. I rose early, also, and gave them their breakfasts, and stood at the gate and waved my hand gaily as they rode away, Martin looking back every now and then until he and his horse became a mere speck in the distance. Then I went indoors, and got out my sewing-machine, intending to have a long, uninterrupted day at my work; but, as the morning advanced, the heat became so stifling that I felt too overpowered to go on, so I took a book and went out into the verandah, and, after reading a few pages, went to sleep in my chair.

How long I slept I do not know; but when at last I awoke, the brightness of the day had vanished. There was a close, stifling smell of smoke and burning vegetation, and Dan, my big dog, was standing by my side, with his great paws resting on my knee, looking anxiously up with his great brown eyes into my face. I think it was the touch of his paw on my arm that had awakened me. I patted his head

and spoke to him lazily, and he whimpered and licked my hand, and, finding that I did not rise from my chair, he took hold of my dress and pulled it gently, as was his custom when he wanted me to go anywhere with him.

"What do you want, old boy? It is too hot to go into the garden," I said, lazily. But I humoured him, and rose and went out of the verandah into the garden.

One side of it was sheltered by a thick row of trees; from the other, the great veldt, here and there broken by clumps of camel-thorns or low bushes, stretched away for miles, all brown and parched now with the heat.

I paused by the low fence, and shading my eyes with my hand, I looked curiously at a dense cloud of what seemed like smoke, that came rolling along the veldt, driven before the wind. For a moment I idly wondered what it could be, and then a chill terror swept over me, and I stood rooted to the ground, unable to move or speak. For I knew then what the stifling heat, the smell of smoke, and the odd, suffocating feeling that was in the air, all meant. The veldt was on fire!

Just for one instant I stood and watched the dense cloud that came rolling nearer every moment, then, as Dan gave a piteous whimper, and thrust his nose into my hand, the courage and strength which the sudden terror had momentarily paralysed returned.

"Come, Dan, we have no time to lose," I said; and I ran back into the house to warn the Kafir boys of the impending danger.

No one was there. I looked in vain into the kitchen, then ran out into the yard and opened the stable door, where I expected to find my mare, fleet-footed Bonnbelle, on whom my only hope of escape from a horrible death rested. I opened the door, and called to her; there was no response. I looked again; her stall was empty. She was gone! The Kafirs had taken her, and so cut off my only means of escape!

As I leant, sick, and faint, and trembling, against the door, I heard the welcome sound of horse's feet thundering over the veldt. I started, and looked up, and saw, to my intense relief, Piet de Beer approaching on his great black horse. The sight renewed my courage. I flew to meet him as he drew rein before the gate, and sprang from his saddle.

"Oh, Piet, how good of you! You have come to save me," I cried, and I held out my trembling hands eagerly to him.

"Yes, I have come to save you," he repeated. "I was at —" he named a farm a few miles away—"and I heard the veldt was on fire. I fancied you might be in danger, so I rode back at once."

"Oh, how good of you!" I repeated. "I am all alone, Piet. Jesse and Martin are in town, and those cowardly Kafirs have ridden away on Bonnbelle, and left me to die. But now it is all right; you will save me."

"Yes, I can save you," he said in a low, hoarse voice; "but first of all I must know whom I am saving, and whether it is Martin Despard's wife—or mine!"

He looked so pitiless; there was such a cruel determination in his handsome face, that my heart gave a great throb of terror. I tried to smile.

"What nonsense, Piet! Come, don't let us waste any time," and I looked fearfully behind me. "The wind is rising; the smoke coming nearer. Let us go at once."

I tried to pull him towards the horse; but I might as well have tried to lift the horse with one little finger as to move him an inch from the gate against which he was leaning. He laughed.

"Not till you answer my question, Molly. You must choose now, once and for all, between us: between that Englishman, who is false and treacherous, like all his race, who will tire of you before a year is over, and the man who has loved you for years, who would die himself, or"—he paused a moment and looked at me steadily—"see you die rather than save you for another man, and that man an Englishman!"

The blood rushed back to my heart, leaving me deadly faint and trembling; but, with a strong effort, I forced myself to speak.

"This is scarcely a time for jesting, Piet! Let us get beyond the reach of danger, and then you may jest as much as you like. Come."

Again I tried to pull him from the gate, and to pass him. Again I failed. The mocking smile came round his lips, as he saw my useless attempt and the frantic, longing glances I cast towards the horse.

"It is no jest. Am I likely to jest at such a moment?" he said, in his cold, deliberate voice. "You must choose now, once and for all, between us. I can and

will save you if you will swear to give up Martin Despard, and become my wife at once. Not," he paused again, "otherwise."

"Do you mean that you will leave me here to die alone? Oh, you could not—you could not be so wicked!" I cried in incredulous horror; and I clasped my hands frantically round his arm.

"That is just what I do mean," he said.

"I told you once that the time might come when you would have to choose your bridegroom between death and me. Well, it has come; make your choice."

The cold deliberation in his voice, the cruel look in his eyes, almost maddened me. I was so angry, and I loathed him so intensely, that I lost all sense of fear suddenly. I almost forgot the cruel death that came nearer every instant; and I unclasped my hands from his arm, and threw back my head, and looked at him straight in the face.

"If I must choose between death and you, I choose—death," I said, in a voice as deliberate and calm as his own. "I would rather die a hundred times than live to be the wife of such a base, pitiful coward as you have proved yourself to be to-day!"

He winced a little at that and at the contempt and hatred which I threw into my voice and face as I spoke; but he laughed again.

"Remember his embraces will crush the life out of you; his kisses scorch you," he said.

"His embraces would be more welcome, his kisses sweeter to me than yours could ever be," I retorted. "Beside, after all," and I smiled, scornfully, "it will be an easy death enough. There is plenty of chloral in Martin's medicine-chest. I know exactly how much to take, and I will do it as soon as—it seems necessary! There will be no pain, no suspense, only a long, dreamless sleep!"

"Yes, a sleep from which there is no awakening—which is the end of everything," Piet said, sneeringly.

"Neither you nor I can tell that," I answered. "However, I prefer to risk it, rather than accept life on the terms you offer. I love Martin; how dearly you can never understand, for you do not know what real love is."

I think my words, and the determined tone in which I said them, and the loathing which I dare say was plainly visible in my face, almost drove him mad; if, indeed, he was not already so! His face flushed a dark, angry red; he gave an odd, gasping sound, and I remembered afterwards that he pressed his hand against his

side, as if in some sudden pain. He bent over me, and looked into my face.

"That is your final decision?" he said.

"Yes," I answered; and I turned from him and walked back towards the house. He looked after me for a minute, and then, with a stifled curse, he flung himself on his horse and rode away.

I stood and watched him until horse and rider were lost to sight in the distance; but even then, I could scarcely realise that Piet de Beer—whom I had known all my life—could really have abandoned me to a terrible death! But, when he had quite disappeared, all hope suddenly left me. I was alone. I, who had been sheltered from danger all my life long by Jesse's love, and Bridget's care, was left to face death—and such a death—alone!

I covered my face with my hands, and prayed for strength and courage. I reminded myself of the means by which I could, at all events, ensure myself a painless death; and then, with Dan still clinging close to my side, I re-entered the house, and went into Martin's room and unlocked the cupboard, where I knew his medicine-chest was kept. A few days before, Jesse had been suffering from violent toothache, which had kept him awake for several nights, and Martin had given him a dose of chloral. I was with him when he poured the fluid into a glass, and he had shown me how much might be taken with safety and bring refreshing sleep, and how much more would send a man into the sleep which, as Piet de Beer had told me, had no awakening.

The great calm, which I have read somewhere despair often brings to those for whom hope is past, came to me, as I took the bottle out of the chest and measured the liquid into a glass. I was safe, at all events, from the agonies of death by suffocation or fire. I felt sorry that I could not make Dan safe also. I did my best. I got some milk, and poured a strong dose of chloral into it, and coaxed him to drink; but after the first taste he would take no more.

An old cap, which Martin wore sometimes, was lying on the table. I took it up and kissed it; and I laid my head down on his pillow, and kissed that also; and then calling Dan to me, and with the chloral in my hand, I went out into the verandah—the pretty, shady verandah, where I had spent so many happy hours; where Martin had first kissed me and told me that he loved me; where the great joy of my life had come to me.

The fire was coming nearer now. Already through the smoke I could see the flash of the flame as it ran along and licked up the dry grass, and crackled among the low bushes. I told myself that I would wait till it reached a certain low fence which surrounded a paddock, then I would drink my chloral.

Twice I raised it to my lips, and twice, for life was very sweet—how sweet, I had never known before—to me, I dropped it again.

"Now I must take it," I said, and I patted Dan's head, and turned to give one last look across the veldt in the only direction from which help was possible, and I saw—oh, was there ever a more welcome sight seen by despairing eyes before?—far off, but coming nearer every instant, the figure of a man on horseback, with a led horse galloping by his side.

The sight inspired me with strength and confidence. I flung the chloral away; the glass fell with a tiny crash on the verandah floor; and, with Dan by my side, I flew out of the garden, and across the veldt. My eyes were aching and smarting with the smoke; but still they were keen enough to recognise Martin's features, and also to recognise in the horse that galloped by his side, Piet de Beer's black steed.

I remember vaguely wondering how it came to be there as I hurried on; but in another moment I heard Martin's cheery voice calling to me, bidding me take courage, for I was safe now, and felt the clasp of his arms round me as he swung me on to the black horse.

It appeared, from what Martin told me afterwards, that while they were in town a vague report of the grass fire reached Martin's ears. He felt alarmed respecting my safety, and, leaving a message at the hotel for Jesse, he instantly rode off home. While he was yet some miles away, he saw Piet de Beer approaching on his black horse. As he came nearer, he saw that De Beer's face wore a fixed, ghastly expression, that he seemed to have lost all control over his horse, and that he was swaying from side to side in his saddle. Just as Martin reached him, the black horse put his foot in an ant-bear's hole, and stumbled and fell, flinging De Beer heavily to the ground. Martin caught the horse's bridle as he galloped past, and went to De Beer's assistance, and found, to his horror, that he was quite dead.

"I did not waste much time on him, love," Martin said, stroking my hair caress-

singly, "for I was too anxious and too intent on reaching you—as, thank God, I did—in time. I drew his body under the shade of a clump of thorns, and then I galloped as hard as I could go to Holmwood. By the way, Molly"—he paused abruptly, and looked at me enquiringly—"he was not so very far from Holmwood. Had he been there?"

"Yes, he had been," I murmured.

And then I told him of Piet's visit, and of the shameful bargain which he had tried to drive with me; and as I told him, and saw the firm, stern look that at my words came into his face, and saw how the veins stood out on his clenched right hand, I felt truly thankful that Heaven had taken Piet de Beer beyond the reach of his revenge!

"The coward! the cursed coward! I can scarcely believe that any man could be so vile," he cried. "What will Jesse say when he knows?"

I looked up at him entreatingly.

"He must never know, Martin," I said, solemnly. "Piet de Beer was his friend, and he loved him well. Let us spare him the pain of knowing how unworthy of his friendship Piet was. He is dead now, dear; he cannot do us any more harm; and it is not well, you know, to speak evil of the dead, no matter how much they may have deserved it. We will try to forgive and forget, Martin; and, above all, we will never tell Jesse!"

And we never did. To this day Jesse thinks kindly and tenderly of his dead friend, and mourns over his untimely fate with a never-ceasing regret. And I am well content that it should be so; well content that the memory of the wrong he did me should pass with all other earthly memories and passion, with grief and jealousy, and love and revenge, into the oblivion of that unknown "land where all things are forgotten."

THE VICAR'S AUNT.

By MARGARET MOULE.

CHAPTER I.

ONE lovely spring morning, the Reverend Thomas Clarke was sitting in the morning-room of his pretty country vicarage, taking breakfast in company with his aunt and cousin.

These words instantly suggest to the mind a picture of quiet rustic peace, placidly enjoyed by persons for whom the agitation and toil incident to the earlier and middle periods of life on this planet are, for the most part, over. And in the case of one of the individuals assembled the reality answered to this mental picture. The Vicar's cousin, who sat at the head of the table, engaged with the tea and coffee service, was what is invariably described either as "a maiden lady," or "a lady of uncertain age." But there was some slight certainty in this case—the certainty that Miss Maria Clarke's fiftieth birthday was recorded in archives of the past; not of the future. She was a distant connection of the Vicar's; her remote cousinship being to his father. She was by no means well off, and when, three years before, the Reverend Thomas Clarke had been appointed to the living of Fairmead, she had only too gladly fallen in with the arrangement when he suggested that she should come and keep house for him there. Miss Clarke was one of those people—and they, collectively, conduce unspeakably to the sum of human comfort—who have carried the science of housekeeping to an art; domesticity had "marked her for its own," and the fact seemed announced by every little jingle of the keys she wore hanging outside her severe grey gown.

But, with this one exception, the impression of elderly tranquillity, natural though it is, must be at once reversed, if the truth is to be arrived at.

There were on the head of the Reverend Thomas Clarke none of the snows of age. His countenance bore no deep trace of the wear and tear of years; as he cut the bread there were no visible signs of the abatement of his physical force, and the voice in which he offered to supply his aunt with the staff of life was full and vigorous. The age of the Reverend Thomas Clarke was thirty-two, and his personal appearance possessed great comeliness.

His aunt, who sat opposite to him at the small breakfast-table, was deficient in every characteristic that should have been hers, had the situation been arranged with becoming fitness, or with any due regard to the dignity of her position. Not only did she look no older than her nephew, but she did not even look so old as he did. The reason for this, however, was comparatively simple. As a matter of fact, she was not so old as he. She was exactly eight-and-twenty.

Miss Madeleine Farquhar made no secret of her age; indeed, she was apt to become defiantly aggressive when persons, who were intimate enough to do so, told her the truth; which was, that she frequently looked more as if her years were eighteen than eight-and-twenty. She had a great deal of wavy, dark hair, which she fastened up very badly—so badly, that it was always falling over her forehead, and coming close to her still darker eyebrows, and the pretty gesture with which she tossed it back seemed part of her personality, so often did she use it.

She tossed it back now, as she took the bread the Vicar handed to her, and said, looking at him with a face the preternatural gravity of which seemed to emphasize the laugh lurking beneath it:

"Thomas, what is the use of all my trouble yesterday morning if you can't cut me a nicer bit of bread than that? You'll never understand notches. I do wish you'd let me have the bread in front of me, and cut it always."

"Then I should never get a reasonable slice myself," responded the Vicar.

Before his aunt could frame the answer which was waiting on her saucy lips, Miss Clarke interposed.

"It seems a pity, Tom," she remarked, gravely, handing him at the same time his second cup of coffee, "that you and your aunt should differ so frequently about the bread. It is so trifling a matter. Surely" she went on, turning to Miss Farquhar, "you are rather particular?"

"Particular! of course I am," laughed that young woman. "It's a very proper thing to know one's own mind accurately, isn't it, Thomas? Besides, it would be almost inconsistent, Miss Maria, if Thomas and I agreed about the shape of our bits of bread, when we differ about every single other thing."

Madeleine Farquhar helped herself to marmalade as she ended, and Miss Maria gasped.

Though it was a quiet gasp, and sheltered behind the coffee-pot, it was heartfelt. Since Miss Farquhar's arrival as an inmate of Fairmead Vicarage, a thorn had grown and flourished in poor Miss Maria's pillow. It had been planted there on the day when the Vicar first announced to her that his aunt, Miss Farquhar, had lost her only English home through the marriage and departure for Russia of the elder sister with whom she had lived, and that, as her

only other sister and brother were in India, she preferred to stay in England, and "live with you, Thomas, if you'll give me house-room," so ran the characteristic note which he ended his announcement by reading aloud.

With Miss Farquhar's actual arrival all Miss Maria's fears were realised. The house was, as poor Miss Maria pathetically phrased it, "turned upside down." Miss Farquhar gathered people around her to play tennis, stirred up her nephew to frantic energy in the shape of village concerts and entertainments of every sort, attended personally every possible social function—from a county dinner party to a dance at the young women's institute in Fairmead—and generally went erratically in and out of the Vicarage "like sunshine." At least, so her nephew and others characterised Miss Farquhar's lively course of action; "like a dreadful firework," poor Miss Maria, had she been given to imagery, would have paraphrased the comment.

She concentrated her attention now resolutely on the coffee-pot, feeling this the right thing to do, both for the sake of her own self-respect, and also in order to set Miss Farquhar some example of proper womanly demeanour. Miss Maria was of opinion that much might be done by example. But at this moment, at all events, the plan failed. Miss Farquhar did not even look at Miss Maria as she handed her cup for some coffee; her brows were gathered into a deep and reflective frown, which phenomenon found outward expression a moment later, as she leant one elbow on the table, and said, in a serious and considering voice, to her nephew:

"By the way, Thomas, have you written those notes to the people about the decorations, yet?"

"No," he answered, equally seriously, "since you ask me, I have not."

"Thomas! Oh, Thomas!" she exclaimed.

"Well, Madeleine!" answered her nephew, calmly.

It had cost the Reverend Thomas some thought and anxiety, on entering into daily intercourse with her, to decide on a suitable appellation for his aunt. Finally, her full Christian name had seemed to him a happy compromise between the impossibility of "aunt," and her family name of Madge.

"Oh, Thomas!" she repeated, "you've absolutely no promptitude about you! There's only this week to settle it in; I reminded you of that on Sunday; and all

the people to ask, and the arranging of the church to be thought out. We may as well do that now," pushing her plate away and leaning both elbows on the table, facing him.

"Very well," said the Vicar, "I had already given the subject some slight thought," he added.

"I'm going through the people," pursued his aunt. "There's Mr. Smith; of course he'll help."

"That remains to be seen," responded the Vicar, briefly.

"Oh, that's settled; I saw him yesterday, and told him he was to."

She paused one moment, and in the pause: "There's Miss Gilbert," said the Vicar, "what is she to do?"

"Just exactly what it's most convenient for her to do," said Miss Farquhar, sternly and hastily. "Now, Thomas," she went on, "there is Mrs. Winchester, Lucy Bayly, Miss Marsden——"

"I thought Miss Marsden might undertake the east end," interrupted the Vicar, tentatively.

"The east end," ejaculated his aunt, "I mean to do that myself, Thomas."

"I—I had thought of having a little conversation with you, Madeleine," her nephew began, with a sudden nervousness in his voice.

"Conversation! What need is there for any conversation? I know how you had it decorated at Christmas; and I believe I could do it as well as that," she ended, a little sarcastically.

"Oh, I didn't mean—it's not that, Madeleine—it's—I——"

But the Reverend Thomas Clarke's confusion and conversation were suddenly cut short by the entrance of the parlour-maid.

"Miss Gilbert would like to see you, sir," she said, addressing her master. "She is in the drawing-room. She is sorry to disturb you so early, but it's about some plants for the church."

"I'll come, Mary."

"And I'll come, Thomas," said his aunt, rising hastily; "and you'll come, Miss Maria," turning to her with a sudden look of camaraderie, instantly responded to by Miss Clarke.

"Plants for the church!" observed Miss Farquhar, in a low and sardonic murmur.

"A forward young person," was Miss Maria's response, as his body-guard of two prepared to follow the Vicar into the presence of his admiring and aspiring parishioner.

CHAPTER II.

"My dear Tom," said Miss Maria, mildly, putting her head in at the study door the next afternoon at three o'clock, "it seems to me that your aunt is—calling to you."

A person of less refined susceptibilities than Miss Maria might have said "whistling for you." For, as she held the study door open, the sound of Madge Farquhar's voice came in, exerted in a clear whistle of two notes—a whistle which she had invented and used as a call between herself and her nephew. Poor Miss Maria's feelings as to this mode of summons were such that she could only ignore the terrible sound as a rule. But to-day the pretty whistle had been so strong and continued, that Miss Maria felt obliged to leave her sewing, and make in the study a veiled allusion to the fact.

As she did so, the Reverend Thomas Clarke rose wearily from his writing-table chair.

"Tell Madeleine I shall be ready in ten minutes," he said; "not before."

And as Miss Maria promptly departed to carry out his wishes, the Vicar walked to the window and looked out with an anxious expression on his face. His aunt had asked him to go with her this afternoon, and call personally upon the more important of the decorators to ask their help with the church.

"Notes are too late now, Thomas," she had said, sternly; "we must call."

The Reverend Thomas, though feeling that his slight procrastination had met with indeed a severe chastisement, thought at the same time that the walk this involved would provide an excellent occasion for the "conversation" he had spoken of to his aunt, and assented. Therefore, after lunch, he sought the retirement of his study to think the "conversation" in particular, and things in general, well over before starting. He had important matter for thought.

Miss Madeleine Farquhar was a grave care to her nephew in many ways. Not the least of them arose from the fact that she possessed a considerable fortune; and from this point of view was likely to be much sought after by the least desirable or eligible kind of men. Then her own attractive manner and irresistible charm made her the recipient of endless stories of hopeless devotion; and on every one of her unlucky admirers she smiled equally winningly, and encouraged each and all alike.

Some little time before her arrival at Fairmead, the uninteresting and eminently steady-going married curate had been succeeded by another, the Reverend Stuart Smith by name.

He was young, good-looking, very popular, and, except for his salary, utterly penniless. This trifling detail apart, he was very eligible; what is more, he thought so; and came to Fairmead prepared to find a young woman who should think so also. He had cast tentative glances around him; but his critical and mature mind had not arrived at any decision when Miss Farquhar appeared at Fairmead. With his first sight of her, all the Reverend Stuart Smith's hesitation was over; he sought her society assiduously, and paid her every possible attention that might signify to her that he was prepared to place his salary and his cottage lodgings at her disposal. And Miss Farquhar treated him, as she would have said, "just like the rest."

It was this state of things that was making the Vicar anxious. He had seen—for they were undisguised—the Reverend Stuart's intentions; and he saw his aunt's proceedings—which were equally undisguised—from a man's point of view. She was, he said to himself, "giving Smith every encouragement;" and he did not in the least see how to prevent the imminent crisis. He could only form, as a temporary precautionary step, a firm resolution that Mr. Smith and his aunt should see as little of one another as possible.

And now the prospects of the Easter decorations had rendered the distracted Vicar well-nigh hopeless. It seemed to him an occasion fraught inevitably with fatal consequences. In the church Miss Farquhar and Mr. Smith must be thrown together incessantly throughout a whole day. "And who knows what Madeleine won't do?" thought her afflicted nephew. Therefore the object of his present reflection was to find means to induce his aunt to absent herself from the scene in question; but at the end of his hour's contemplation he had thought of no stratagem, wile, or cunning by which he might gain his end; nor, indeed, had any form of words in which to broach the subject at all occurred to the unfortunate man when he at length presented himself in the hall, where stood Miss Farquhar, impatiently swinging her umbrella.

"Where do you want to go first, Thomas?" she said.

"Where you like," he answered, meekly. "We'd better take Mrs. Winchester first," she went on, briskly. "You're late, and there may not be time for all, and she's much the most important."

Her nephew opened the garden gate as she spoke, and they issued forth together.

The walk was a pretty one, and, on this April afternoon, everything was looking very beautiful in the spring sunlight. The hedges with their faint green, the primroses under the high banks, the soft blue of the sky, with the white little clouds blown across it by a soft west wind, all made up a picture which quieted by its beauty even Miss Farquhar's high spirits. At least, it is to be inferred so, for her mischievous, laughing face grew thoughtful, and she spoke very little during the first ten minutes. The Vicar spoke not at all. Every now and then he energetically hit some small stone into the far distance along the lane with his walking-stick; and seemed by his manner to intend this action as a prelude to a speech. But the speech did not follow; and at the fourth repetition of the prelude, Miss Farquhar turned to her nephew, and said, enquiringly:

"Thomas, what in the world is wrong? Anything in the parish?"

She looked at him as she spoke, with a rather anxious look on her pretty face, for Madeleine Farquhar was, in spite of all her provoking, saucy ways, at the bottom of her heart truly very fond of "Thomas," as she made a point of calling him, and very sympathetic to him.

They were now only three minutes' walk from Mrs. Winchester's door; the sight of her house so near gave the Vicar a spasmodic courage, and he said, after a little pause:

"Madeleine, I alluded to it yesterday. I—really cannot allow you to decorate."

Miss Farquhar looked at him with the gaze of one who looks upon a dreamer.

"Do you mean what you began to say at breakfast, yesterday?" she asked, calmly. They were by this time on Mrs. Winchester's doorstep, and as the door was opened, "Wait till we come out," she added, in a tone that carried its own tale to the Vicar's mind.

Mrs. Winchester was talking to another caller as the Vicar and his aunt were shown in; but she rose instantly, and came forward to greet them. She was a little, well-meaning, overdressed woman, neither old nor young.

"I am very glad to see you, Miss Farquhar," she said. "Won't you sit

there, Mr. Clarke?" motioning him to a chair beside herself, near the tea-table. The Vicar turned to find the chair she indicated, and became, as he did so, aware of the other caller; the other caller was the Reverend Stuart Smith. The Vicar nodded to him faintly; but Miss Farquhar, with a mischievous look at her nephew, said, coolly:

"Thomas, you will tell Mrs. Winchester what we came for?" and established herself forthwith in a chair close by Mr. Smith.

The Vicar took one moment to gather his forces, while his hostess poured out two cups of tea, one of which she was just handing to the Vicar to convey to his aunt, when it was reft from her by the energetic Mr. Smith, who had watched his opportunity from afar. As he took it, he remarked cheerily to the Vicar:

"I have arranged satisfactorily for the library, so as to give me plenty of time on Saturday for the church."

"Indeed!" was the only response the Vicar found possible at the moment. And then he was obliged to watch Mr. Smith carry, in an agile manner, the tea and cake across the room, and triumphantly ensconce himself beside Miss Farquhar.

An anguished glance at his aunt was followed by a sudden desperate sense that it behoved him to speak to his hostess, and the Vicar pulled himself together, and valiantly opened the conversation. In as few words as possible he spoke of the object of his visit; he asked her to help in the church and to undertake her usual work of decorating the font; and he received the ready acquiescence of one who has been hoping for the request, and wondering why it tarried. And, wholly unconscious of her Vicar's terseness and abstraction, Mrs. Winchester went on to lay before him an elaborate description of all that she had provisionally designed in the way of decorative art. But the description fell on unheeding senses. The Vicar grew more and more abstracted; until, at length, if she had proposed to drape the chancel arch in the Union Jack, and the belfry window in the Stars and Stripes, he would have given a cheerful, unconscious acquiescence to either, or both. All his attention was absorbed by his aunt and Mr. Smith, and, quite regardless of any decorum, he listened intently to every scrap of their conversation which came across the hearthrug.

That his aunt was arranging with Mr. Smith to help her in her decorations grew clearer and clearer to his agitated perceptions; and when, after what seemed

to her nephew an interminable time, she rose, her last words were unmistakeable.

"You'll be sure to be in good time," she said to Mr. Smith, "and bring me plenty of moss."

Mr. Smith took his leave at the same time as they did, but their ways, fortunately for the Vicar's feelings, separated on the doorstep; as it was, he scarcely waited for Mr. Smith's severely-correct clerical figure to disappear, before he turned to his aunt.

"Madeleine," he said, "I hardly know how best to express myself."

"Don't trouble, Thomas," she responded.

"My feelings about your demeanour to—to—my curate," he could not bring himself at the moment even to name the individual in question, "are quite beyond expression. But you surely must understand now why I ask, I desire, you not to decorate."

"Indeed, Thomas, I don't! If it's because Mr. Smith is—rather foolish—that is too absurd. Let me assure you, you are agitating yourself quite unnecessarily. I intend to decorate; and I intend Mr. Smith to help me," she ended, laughing.

"Madeleine——" he began.

"Thomas," she interposed, still laughing, "it's not the least use to waste words on me; and, there's another thing to be said. If for no other reason, I should come to the church on Saturday to look after you."

"To look after me!"

"To look after you. If some one does not keep a sharp look-out on her, Miss Gilbert will propose to you and marry you by main force."

"Miss Gilbert!" stammered the unfortunate man, with a bewildering sense that this was indeed carrying the war into the enemy's own country. "Indeed, indeed, Madeleine, you are wholly mistaken."

"Indeed, indeed, Thomas, I am not," she retorted. "She would marry you to-morrow."

"But I've no intention, whatever, of marrying her," said the Vicar, earnestly.

"That makes no difference. She has the intention. And I shall devote myself to saving you."

"I shall devote myself to the faint hope of saving you," he answered. "Madeleine, I do wish you would reassure me. Perhaps I am wrong after all; perhaps you really have no intention of accepting Mr. Smith?" he ended, imploringly and interrogatively.

"Mr. Smith is a very nice young man," returned his aunt, demurely.

"But utterly unsuitable!"

"A very nice young man!" she repeated, emphatically.

"Ineligible to the last——"

The Vicar was interrupted. At that moment a man rode by; a tall man, not very young, and with a rather wild, careless expression on his pleasant, handsome face. His eyes brightened as he greeted the Vicar and Miss Farquhar. Miss Farquhar bowed; the Vicar said, rather coldly, "Good morning, Meldrum"; and as the man rode out of sight he turned again to his aunt, and said:

"To go back to Smith. I can only say that you might as well marry Meldrum. A careless ne'er-do-well of a doctor with no prospects is no worse than a penniless curate with a living in the dim future."

"He's got no one to care for," said Miss Farquhar, half-reflectively and irrelevantly.

"His step-sister," began her nephew, "Janet——" Then, breaking off suddenly, he said: "Madeleine, I can say no more. You know my mind. If you persist in your determination, I can only do my best to look after you."

"And I shall do my best to look after you," she answered. "And you've no idea how well the east end will look when Mr. Smith and I have done."

CHAPTER III.

It was early on the morning of the Saturday before Easter, and Fairmead Church was standing in the full glory of April sunshine. It was a beautiful old church, almost untouched by nineteenth century "restoration," or what is, if possible, worse—the same process carried out according to eighteenth century lights. It had seen its first freshness before the Wars of the Roses, and while generation after generation of peaceful Fairmead people had lived and died close to it, and the stir of great events in the outside world had worn through four centuries, the country church stood just the same, looking as if on it Time had forgotten to do his work fully, and had only left slight touches, in the shape of worn pillars and dulled outlines here and there.

Through the large east window the sun shone on a pretty, unconventional scene; the inside of the church was a confused whole of colour, light, and movement.

Great masses of dark moss, pale primroses, and yellow daffodils lay about in baskets, or loose in picturesque confusion on the old grey stone pavement, every-

where. And their fresh, strong scent was mixed with a stronger breath from sweet hothouse lilies, delicate cyclamens, cytusus, and primulas, which stood waiting to be used, in groups here and there, at the base of a pillar.

There were moving figures everywhere. Mrs. Winchester was kneeling in front of the font, with flowers on each side of her, and girls, with hands full of wreaths, or lovely loose flowers, were moving to and fro between the window-sills, pillars, and arches, and knocking surreptitious nails into the pulpit and reading-desk in support of their handiwork.

In the most conspicuous position in the whole church, full in view from every corner of it, sat Miss Gilbert, working with frantic haste at a large wreath.

Miss Gilbert was an amiable young person of three or four-and-thirty, who, having more than once heard herself described as "getting on," had firmly resolved not to "get on" alone—in other words, she had determined to marry—and, by dint of intense personal belief in them, she had contrived to establish her "attractions" as a firm fact in the minds of all her friends; first and foremost among them, ever since his arrival in Fairmead, she had enrolled the Reverend Thomas Clarke.

On her entrance into the church, two hours earlier, she had proposed to Miss Farquhar, with great friendliness and sweetness, that she should wreath the nave pillars, thinking this an undertaking to be carried out in her own time and plan, and affording boundless possibilities of assistance from her Vicar.

Miss Farquhar had met the proposition with even more sweetness of demeanour.

"An excellent idea!" she said. "I had already thought of them, Miss Gilbert, and have taken the length. I thought, also, it would be well to make them here," indicating the before-mentioned conspicuous position. "I have had the moss laid here; and there is a good support," fastening up a measured string she had taken from her pocket, while Miss Gilbert stood speechless and helpless beside her. "I think they should be begun at once," she added, pensively. "There are, I think, eight pillars. I will send Janet Meldrum to help you."

And smiling sweetly on Miss Gilbert, Miss Farquhar had begun her own avocations.

In the midst of his decorators and decorations the Reverend Thomas Clarke walked backwards and forwards. Up and

down the middle aisle, into the transept, and through the chancel he walked—with a walk that was anxious, and so incessant, that he might be said to pervade the whole church. He cast tentative, distant glances every now and then in the direction of Miss Gilbert, and the girl who was helping her—Janet Meldrum, a fair-haired, fragile-looking girl with a delicate, expressive face, who led a rather lonely life with her step-brother, the clever and careless doctor of Fairmead. But he never paused there; his walk invariably tended to one destination, and that destination was the chancel—and that especial part of the chancel where his aunt, perched on a ladder, was engaged in placing moss on a sloping frame in the sill of the east window; while, at the bottom of the ladder, holding up a good-sized clothes-basket full of moss, stood the Reverend Stuart Smith.

At half-past twelve Miss Farquhar descended suddenly.

"That'll do, Mr. Smith, for the present, I think," she said; "I've done half, and my arm aches. The moss is so full of bits, too; suppose we sort it a little? Bring it to the choir-seats, and we can sit down and turn it over together."

Mr. Smith assented radiantly, and as they established themselves close together, with the moss at their feet, Madeleine Farquhar cast a wicked look of defiance at her unhappy nephew, who was just then anxiously ending his nineteenth perambulation in their vicinity. He said nothing, but his countenance turned blue with hopeless anguish; then a sudden idea seemed to break upon his gloom, and without consulting his watch, he precipitately left the church, hurried across the churchyard to the Vicarage, and gave orders that the luncheon gong should be rung at once. Miss Farquhar heard it, as her nephew intended she should; she rose, and throwing the bits of moss lightly from her skirts, said to Mr. Smith:

"Come in to lunch, won't you?"

And the Vicar, returning to see the success of his plan, met them both on the front doorstep. At luncheon the Vicar was silent and laconic when Miss Maria enquired with interest "how they were getting on." But his aunt more than made up for his silence, by imparting to Miss Maria every detail of the work which she and Mr. Smith had accomplished and yet intended to accomplish together.

On rising from the luncheon-table the Vicar was detained by the parlour-maid;

he thereupon went into the kitchen for a moment, and then, his countenance blue no more, sped joyously after the other two to the church.

"Smith," he said, breathlessly, as he gained the east end, "old Mrs. Mason has just sent for either you or me to come directly, she does not expect to live till morning. I cannot possibly leave, of course! Will you go to her at once?"

Mr. Smith let the clothes-basket fall.

"Mrs. Mason!" he said, in a voice fraught with innumerable emotions.

"Mrs. Mason," said the Vicar, firmly, and as he added, "you'll not lose any time, Smith?" each man looked at the other. Each knew well the facts of the case; namely, that this was at least the fiftieth time the parishioner in question had not expected to live till morning, and had demanded instant ghostly counsel and comfort; that she was as likely as not to outlive them both; and that her cottage was nearly two miles away. Mr. Smith looked from his Vicar to Miss Farquhar, and then at the Vicar again; but as even Miss Farquhar's rapid expostulation brought no sign of relenting to the latter's face, he dejectedly straightened his collar, sought his hat, and promising Miss Farquhar to come back at once, departed through the chancel door.

The Vicar, as it shut, refrained from entering into conversation with his aunt, and sauntered in a light-hearted manner to where Miss Gilbert, with Janet Meldrum's help, was feverishly toiling through the seventh wreath.

"Thomas," called Miss Farquhar, from the ladder, in a voice corresponding to a certain description in the Communion service, "Thomas, will you help Janet put flowers into those wreaths which are already put up? You will spare her for a little, Miss Gilbert? The flowers are in the transept, Thomas, and Janet knows exactly what is wanted, if you will hand them to her."

With a simple, "Yes, Madeleine," her nephew meekly left the chancel, accompanied by Miss Meldrum.

The sun grew lower and the shadows longer, and Miss Gilbert ended her last wreath, and, without one comment from Miss Farquhar, bore it away triumphantly. Miss Farquhar did not even see her go. Her attention was otherwise engaged. From her ladder she could see into the street of Fairmead, and apparently she had seen something unexpected there, for she descended the ladder in sudden haste, a

bright colour in her face. The chancel door opened as she did so, and a man came up to her, the same man who had ridden by Miss Farquhar and her nephew two days before. He took her hands in his, quickly, and said, in a low voice:

"Miss Farquhar, I knew I should find you here. May I speak to you? I've had some good news to-day—about money—and I couldn't wait—you know what I want to say; but I can't say it here," looking anxiously round at the distant forms of the other decorators.

Miss Farquhar looked through her downcast, long lashes at Dr. Meldrum, and then round the church. Finally she said, very low:

"I was going to look at the effect of my work from the lancet window, in the tower. If you like to come in by the tower door, you may."

The wreaths were all completed with flowers, and with a fervent hope that her nephew might be safely gone home to tea, Miss Farquhar opened the little door at the foot of the tower stairs. A moment later Dr. Meldrum joined her, and they went up the short stairs together. They went up, that is to say, until by a sudden turn of the winding stair, about three steps below it, the window in question became visible. And then Miss Farquhar, who was in front, stopped suddenly. Not half-a-dozen yards from her, against that very window, stood her nephew, his arm round Janet Meldrum's waist, and her head on his shoulder.

"Thomas!" she exclaimed, with the authority of an aunt.

"Madeleine!" he answered, in the tone of a guardian, as Meldrum came into view.

Miss Farquhar's authority suddenly vanished.

"We're engaged, Thomas," she said; "at least," she stammered, in crimson and ungrammatical confusion, "we're going to."

Her nephew was equally ungrammatical, but unconfused.

"Janet and I have," he responded.

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